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IRISH BOGS

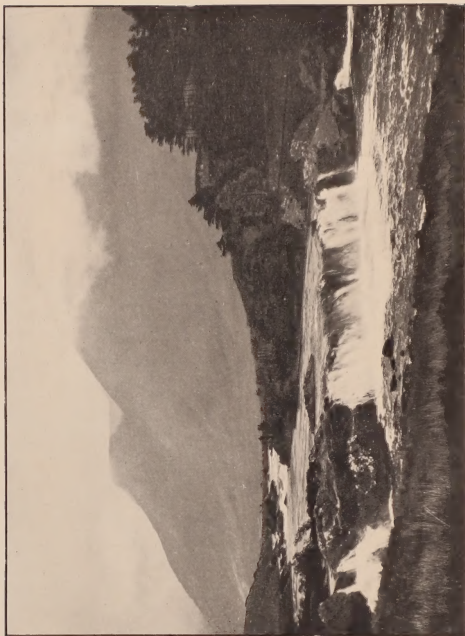


Photo : B. D. Holberton

A SALMON RIVER IN THE WEST

IRISH BOGS

SPORT AND COUNTRY LIFE IN THE
IRISH FREE STATE

By
J. W. SEIGNE

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO. LTD.
LONDON • NEW YORK • TORONTO

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LONGMANS, GREEN AND CO.

55 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
221 EAST 20TH STREET, CHICAGO
TREMONT TEMPLE, BOSTON
210 VICTORIA STREET, TORONTO

Made in Great Britain

PREFACE

“**T**HE old Ireland that I knew and loved is gone for ever,” writes an Irish lady now living in London, “only the mountains and bogs, the rivers and lakes remain.”

It is true that, so far as social conditions are concerned, much the same might be said of England; but in Southern Ireland the change has been swift and tragic and, in the process, many have been driven from their country. Often only blackened ruins now mark the site of houses which were former centres of social life and sport.

Still, it is no use continually bemoaning the past. The Government of the Irish Free State has done wonders in a short time, and once more there is security of life and property throughout the land. Best of all, England's generosity has made possible the dawn of a new era of friendship between the two countries.

Life in England is becoming congested, and people of moderate means often find a difficulty in following their favourite sport. Before the War many sportsmen came over to Ireland regularly for hunting, fishing and shooting. Conditions have now altered considerably, and some of the new generation are ignorant of what the country has to offer.

The main object of this book is to enable an opinion to be formed on the sport obtainable under present-day conditions. For this purpose it is hoped that "A Chapter on Hunting"—for which I am indebted to my friend, Captain A. J. Fox—and the information on fishing and shooting given in the Appendix will be found useful. I am afraid this information is far from being complete, but it is based on the personal experiences of people living in the country, and care has been taken to make it as accurate as possible.

Those who have shot in Ireland in the past will chiefly recall pleasant days after 'cock and snipe. Indeed, but for these delightful birds many districts would not be worth shooting over. As both species are so characteristic of the country and its swamps, I have attempted to give some description of their habits at the risk of covering ground which has already been dealt with to some extent by more skilled writers. If my notes throw no fresh light on the subject, I can only plead in extenuation a love of birds and much patient observation in the field.

In "A Fishing Hut on the River Lee" mention is made of Mr A. H. Wood's method of salmon-fishing, with the fly just submerged and the line greased, which has proved so successful on the Dee. It seems to be equally successful during the summer months on some of the early rivers in Ireland. I have, therefore, included some notes on the subject sent me by my brother,

Major R. B. Seigne, with the somewhat misleading title, "Nothing New under the Sun," "for," he writes, "it is just when fishing 'under the sun' that the results of this new method become most patent."

For the rest the chapters are mostly descriptive of wild sport and country life in remote places—just idle jottings of a Retired officer living in the Irish Free State, which if they convey a tithe of its charm will have fulfilled their aim.

Part of "A Connemara Estuary" appeared in *Chambers's Journal*, and of the chapter on "Woodcock" in *Country Life*. Part of the chapter on "Fishing in the Irish Free State" appeared in *English Life*, and two stories in "Tim Murphy's Shoot" in *The Westminster Gazette*. My thanks are due to the Editors of these papers for permission to republish.

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IRISH BOGS

CHAPTER ONE

SNIPE

FYNES MORYSON, who was Secretary to Lord Mountjoy, Lord Deputy of Ireland in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, thus describes the country: "The land of Ireland is uneven, mountainous, soft, watery, and so fenny that it hath bogs even on the tops of mountains not bearing man or beast, and such bogs are frequent all over Ireland." This description is equally true to-day.

As you travel through many parts of the South and West of Ireland the chief impression conveyed by the scenery is that of miles of dreary bogs stretching away on every side.

The actual colouring of a bog may consist of many subtle shades, but, seen on one of those depressing days of ceaseless drizzle which the country people term a "nice soft day," it looks a picture of moist, grey desolation; a gloomy, savage, treacherous place; an epitome of all the worst traits of the Irish character.

The same bog on a fine day and on closer acquaintance reveals itself to be a charming patchwork of colour—rust-brown sedges, crimson sphagnum moss, black

peaty pools encircled by heather, and here and there a bit of vivid green vegetation where the will-o'-the-wisps dance o' nights, and where one may sink up to the middle in a minute.

In spring many wild flowers grace the bog—orchids of different varieties, bog-violets, meadow-sweet, ragged-robin, golden asphodel and bog-cotton, with silken plumes like gigantic snowflakes hovering over the ground. Yellow iris, or “flaggers,” as they are called, mingle with the reeds and hide the pond where the wild duck rears its brood. In the sky snipe rise and fall with rhythmic regularity, while their mates sit closely on the nests in the rushes. Here, too, may be heard that most beautiful of all bird notes—the liquid bubbling call of nesting curlews. At other times shy and unapproachable, these birds are now tame enough and preoccupied with family life.

In olden times the English settlers sometimes contemptuously called the wild Irish “Morashites,” which, being interpreted, means men of the morasses, or bog-trotters. Certainly to become a proficient bog-trotter requires much practice. To learn to walk a bog without getting unnecessarily wet or floundering into bog-holes and, at the same time, to be able to concentrate on snipe, is almost as difficult an art as snipe-shooting itself.

Only years of experience can teach you the feel of a bog—that is, whether the ground underfoot can be trusted or not, and when to withdraw before plunging

into difficulties. Even a "quaking bog" is generally passable in places, but a wrong step may land you up to the waist in slimy mud and can be extremely dangerous if you are by yourself.

The most accomplished bog-trotter I ever met, and also the best snipe-shot, was an old gentleman who lived in an immense, ramshackle place in the wilds of Cork. Retiring from the army with the rank of Major, his slender pension, together with the rents which his tenants occasionally paid him, just enabled him to settle down in comparative comfort to the life of a country gentleman. He saved himself any expense on the repairs of the house by the simple expedient of moving into another wing when the roof fell in over the part he was occupying.

Like many another retired campaigner of the good old school, he hung his sword over his bed, devoted the weekdays to sport, and on Sundays read the lessons in church with military precision.

It was his proud boast that from the hall door he could walk ten miles in any direction over good snipe country. Indeed, this was no exaggeration, because the land for miles round was in the same condition as a farm belonging to a certain Tipperary farmer, who, when asked by the judge during the hearing of a complicated land dispute whether his property was wet, replied: "Wet is it, Your Lordship, shure it would give a snipe neuralgia!"

The Major was on excellent terms with his neighbours, and had permission to shoot over their lands. He knew every bog and the best weather conditions for shooting it. He knew also all the marshy spots between the bogs where snipe might be found. In spite of his sixty odd years he could walk the bogs all day and come home fresh at the end of it. Even when snipe got up in wisps he never became flurried, and I have seen him achieve several right-and-lefts in quick succession.

Quickness, in his opinion, was everything in snipe-shooting. Winter snipe in Ireland usually rise at a fair distance and often almost out of range. They fly off at a tremendous rate in a maze of twists. Therefore fire directly they get up except on the rare days when the birds are lying close, then a little law will generally secure an easier shot, as, after zigzagging wildly for a dozen yards or so, they often fly straight enough. Load immediately, because after you have fired at a distant snipe another often rises within easy range. Aim slightly above a snipe, as it is rising the whole time; also, when taking a crossing bird, aim well forward, bearing in mind its pace. Use a light, well-balanced 12-bore gun and nothing smaller than No. 8 shot. When going through a bog avoid unnecessary splashing, and, above all, do not talk, as snipe are especially susceptible to the human voice.

These were salient points in the Major's advice when,



Photo : J. Kershaw

SNIFE BROODING

as often happened, some friend asked him the secret of his prowess in a bog.

He did not believe in waders, but maintained that old boots which let the water in and out freely were the best equipment for a long day's snipe-shooting. In any ordinarily wet bog the water sooner or later comes in over the tops of waders, and there is then nothing more uncomfortable to walk in. In any case it is impossible to walk long distances with waders on.

On one occasion the Major got wet up to the middle and, having no change with him, took off his nether garments and wrapped himself in a rug before starting on the long drive home in a dog-cart. A few miles from the village he met the doctor's daughter, who asked for a lift, and got up beside him. The evening was a bitterly cold one, and the young lady cast longing eyes at the rug which the Major kept tightly wrapped round him. For a shy and correct old bachelor, the situation was a most uncomfortable one. During the drive a polite but desultory conversation was maintained — the sort of prim, old-fashioned conversation Miss Maria Edgeworth would have delighted to record. Both were immensely relieved when at last the village came in sight. The Major's troubles were not allowed to end here, however, for the lady got a chill which she unhesitatingly attributed to his want of consideration in not offering to share the rug.

The habits of snipe are very similar to those of

woodcock except that, of the two, snipe are the more dependable. A wood may be deserted by 'cock, but seldom, if ever, will a good bog be entirely devoid of snipe. The number, of course, may vary greatly from day to day, but what will chiefly strike a man who shoots snipe regularly throughout the winter is that on some days the birds are extraordinarily wild, getting up in wisps often out of range, whereas on other days they will lie well and rise singly. Like 'cock, on calm moonlight nights they visit favourite feeding-grounds, and, in consequence, are well fed and lazy by day. But on dark nights, or during wet stormy weather, they keep to the shelter of the bogs and are then hungry and wild.

Snipe usually lie best on those mild, springlike days, with little or no wind, which come so often during an Irish winter—days when inky clouds, laden with moisture, hang low over the hills, and shafts of golden light pass across the country touching each feature in turn with a magic wand. Very beautiful, but difficult and deceptive from a shooting point of view, for when the light goes the bog rises dark and menacing before you, making it almost impossible to see the birds or to judge distance.

I have noticed on days when a waning moon lasts well into the morning that snipe are scarce in the big bogs. The reason, I think, is that the snipe which flight out at night to the turnip fields, heathery hills and marshy spots all over the country, are still greedily

feeding in the moonlight when day, coming suddenly as it does, surprises them. They do not then think it worth while to return to their resting places in the bogs.

During hard frosts snipe resort to wherever the water is unfrozen and the ground soft. They are to be found near such places as springs in bogs, wet dykes, ditches, and the banks of little streams. Food is scarce enough, however, for, with the approach of frost, the worms retire deep into the soil out of reach of their bills, and the starving birds become very unsettled.

In snipe country there are invariably certain favourite spots where one or two snipe are always found. It may be but a bunch of rushes or a swampy place in a field where, no matter how dry the weather, the land is soft and boggy owing to underground springs. Often there seems to be no special reason why snipe prefer these spots above others; probably the secret lies in an abundant supply of food and cover to their liking. Certain it is that if the snipe which inhabit them are shot, others immediately take their place.

I am fortunate in having several sure finds for snipe near my home, so that whenever, like Mother Hubbard, I find the cupboard bare, I can rely on a snipe for dinner at any rate.

In some districts in Ireland there are red bogs and black bogs. Sometimes there are more snipe in one than in the other, but why this should be the case has

never been satisfactorily explained to me. The local keeper or poacher—often he combines both professions—seems to know by instinct the best bog to make for on any particular day.

Walking across an Irish bog in summer I have been surprised at the number of snipe there, and a good proportion of the birds shot in winter must be home-bred.

In winter a snipe gives one few opportunities of studying its ways. If disturbed, a harsh cry, a zigzag flash of brown, a glimpse of white breast as it turns up in the wind, and then it is off for miles. So far as the sportsman is concerned, the snipe is either in the bag or very much out of it.

In summer a snipe's behaviour is very different. Shyness and fear of man have gone and all it cares about is the serious business of courtship. Rising from the bog, as often as not silently, it ascends high in the air, like a lark, and then suddenly descends in a graceful curve, fairly rapidly, to within a short distance of the ground. During its descent the snipe makes that curious drumming noise, like a goat bleating.

Snipe drumming have always fascinated me, and I have spent many hours watching them. Briefly, this is what happens: having reached a good height over the bog, the snipe takes a downward swoop, at an angle of about forty-five degrees. The wings are half closed but vibrating rapidly, with a peculiar tremulous movement. The tail is spread fanwise to the uttermost and



Photo : J. Kershaw

RETURNING TO THE NEST

held slightly elevated over the back. The drumming is heard as soon as the bird starts descending, the volume of sound increasing with the pace. Occasionally the bird can be heard making a vocal sound at the same time as it is drumming. Although for years the subject of snipe drumming was one of considerable controversy among naturalists, most competent observers now agree in thinking that both wings and tail take their share in producing the noise. The angle of the snipe's fall and the half-closed wings shivering violently, throw a strong current of air on to the two outer feathers of the tail, which are very stiff and isolated from the others. The rapid vibration set up in these feathers as a result, gives forth a high, droning note, and the tremulous movement of the wings makes a sort of low humming accompaniment.

A passable imitation of a snipe drumming can be made by sticking the tail feathers of a shot bird in a weighted cork and swinging this round violently. But the sound thus produced lacks the depth and volume of the real thing.

While snipe are engaged in drumming, they perform many other evolutions in the air. Sometimes they fold their wings and drop vertically to within a few feet of the ground, or, with both wings fully extended, glide gracefully through the air. I have even seen them turn a complete somersault. It is only, however, when they are descending, with the wings half shut and tail fully extended, that the drumming is heard, so that it is

reasonable to infer that these positions are necessary for the production of the sound.

At the height of the nesting season in May the sound of snipe drumming comes from all parts of a bog, and can be heard half-a-mile or more away. The birds are busily rising and falling, time after time, until sheer exhaustion compels them to drop to the ground. I have never heard snipe drumming before March or after June, although instances have been noted of their doing so as late as October.

Another sound, which is not so pleasant but which is equally characteristic of snipe in the breeding season, is a very simple by-syllabic vocal sound. It is difficult to write down a bird's note, but the words "chicka, chicka," repeated over and over again, give some idea of it. Both sexes continually utter this sound, and early in the season both join in drumming flights. Thus they give expression to the sheer ecstasy of life, their joy at the coming of spring and all that it means to them. Later on the serious duty of hatching claims the female, but her mate still soars overhead and cheers the tedious hours with his music. Every now and then he descends beside her and tells her all the gossip of the marshes, or sets off on a foraging expedition, to return with a succulent worm or other titbit to tempt her appetite. She leaves the nest only for the short morning and evening flights round the home, which are such a feature of snipe life.

Near my place I have noticed snipe often during the spring and summer perch on an old dead poplar-tree, from which an uninterrupted view of the bog could be obtained. This, too, is a peculiarity of the nesting season, as I have never seen them perch on trees at any other time.

Migratory snipe are more regular in their visits than woodcock, and begin to arrive from Northern Europe about the middle of October—which is quite soon enough to start snipe-shooting—leaving again early in March. While with us they shift their feeding-grounds frequently, and this often accounts for the great increase of snipe in a bog.

Of course with snipe, as with woodcock, whether you get a good season or not largely depends on the luck of migration. If the weather conditions are good during the time of the main migration from the northern breeding-grounds, there will at any rate be plenty of birds in the country, although on some days it may be difficult to find them. But if winds are persistently adverse the chances are that many large flights of snipe never reach land at all, but perish miserably of exhaustion at sea.

The first jack-snipe is a welcome sight to the sportsman, for this little fellow generally heralds the arrival of the main body of snipe in the marshes and 'cock in the coverts.

On several occasions I have seen jack-snipe in an Irish bog in April, and once in May. I have never succeeded

in finding a nest, and there does not appear to be any instance on record of these attractive little birds breeding in Great Britain or Ireland. I should not like to have to confess the number of times I have missed a jack-snipe when it has jumped up almost from under my feet and gone off silently, with an absurdly crooked flight, only to drop again into the bog a short distance away. On such occasions there is a crumb of comfort to be got from the old story of the jack-snipe which provided the Colonel of a regiment stationed in Ireland with a whole season's shooting. This bird spent the winter in a small boggy field near the barracks. Whenever hunting and other important duties permitted, the Colonel used to take a day off for snipe-shooting. On the way home he invariably rose and fired at the jack-snipe—whereupon the jack, although quite untouched, immediately dropped into the rushes, and, as is customary with these birds when frightened, lay like a stone. The Colonel then used to make a prolonged and, needless to say, fruitless search for the "dead bird." He never "became wise" to the habits of jack-snipe. Always at mess afterwards he explained how the bird must have been shot, for otherwise it would have got up again, and his officers were much too polite to contradict him.

Probably the reason why even good shots so often miss jack-snipe is that the bird is so small that it gets in between the pattern of the shot.



Photo : J. Kershaw

SNIFE AND CHICK

In mild weather many snipe desert the big bogs for the small outlying marshes, swampy fields, and heather-clad hills. In such places they frequently lie well, and a good bag can be obtained if you are prepared to work hard for it. For this kind of shooting a steady Irish setter or pointer is invaluable, and saves miles of walking. In a wet bog, where snipe often rise in wisps out of range, this type of dog can be more of a nuisance than otherwise, but a well-trained retriever or, better still, an Irish water-spaniel, where there is a chance of a shot at duck, is a welcome companion, and saves much fruitless searching for dead birds in heavy cover.

Shooting once in a wild part of Kerry, I was met by a man with a gun and dog. The man looked like a hardened poacher, the dog was a wild-looking Irish setter. He assured me that his dog had a wonderful nose for all game—moreover, he could always tell by the “set” of the dog what kind of a bird it was. Being anxious to see this paragon at work, I accompanied the poacher until we arrived at some boggy fields. The dog ranged round a bit, eventually coming to a set at a patch of rushes. The owner, motioning me to stand still, went up alone to the dog. The chief thing that struck me about the animal was that its absurd “stance,” with one hind-leg in the air, contravened all the rules drawn up for the breed at field trials. After a careful examination, the man returned to me with an air of deep mystery. “Advance on snipe,” he whispered.

We then "advanced" towards the dog. Sure enough, it was a snipe—indeed it could hardly have been anything else in such a spot. Unfortunately the guns failed badly in their part of the business, for we both missed it.

Although they may dart away in any direction, snipe, like other birds, usually rise against the wind; therefore, whenever possible, it is better to walk down wind in the hope of getting a shot before they are really under way. But it is more important to map out the short winter's day so as to cover as much snipe-ground as possible before the light fails, than to lose time by following this advice.

When snipe are wild, small, conveniently shaped bogs can be driven with great success by sending in a man to put up the birds and hiding the guns behind a ditch to windward. Attempts to drive large bogs generally end in failure, as the snipe, after flying straight away for a short distance, rise high in the air and go off in all directions. Driven snipe provide very sporting and difficult shots, especially in a high wind.

One hears of big bags of snipe being made in the East, eighty and even a hundred couple to one gun in a day being not uncommon. But it is a very different matter to snipe-shooting at home. The birds' flight is often a tame enough affair, quite lacking in that twist and speed which makes it such a difficult mark on an Irish bog. Indeed, when snipe are in great numbers, it is sometimes only a question of time and sufficient

cartridges for even a bad shot to get a large bag. Under these conditions the making of records is not my idea of sport. Fortunately, such "slaughter of the innocents" is rarely possible in Ireland, and, on an average day, over good snipe country, the man who can get ten couple to his own gun must not only be a good shot, but a good "bog-trotter" into the bargain.

CHAPTER TWO

WOODCOCK

A FEW years ago I formed one of a party shooting some noted woodcock coverts in County Tipperary. The weather conditions were ideal—a succession of hard frosts at night followed by cold but sunny days. The woods consisted for the most part of young larch plantations clothing the southern slopes of the hills and merging into the heather. The undercover was such as would most appeal to 'cock—holly, rhododendrons, laurels, scrub-oak, whin, brambles and bracken. Here and there were moist patches where, even in the hardest weather, the earth under the leaves was soft, and could be probed with ease by their bills. With the surrounding mountains capped in snow, and the country as hard as iron, one would have thought no right-minded, sensible woodcock could have resisted these warm sheltered woods. Contrary to all expectations, however, the birds were far from plentiful, and the total for three days' hard walking was only twenty-one couple, when a bag of at least fifty or sixty couple should have been obtained.

Glorious days spent in such surroundings make a pleasant interlude in life, and poor sport is not enough to mar the enjoyment of them. Still, it is only natural

to feel disappointed at so small a bag, especially when, from all accounts, there were any number of 'cock in the woods just before the shoot.

Why had the birds suddenly vanished in this annoying manner, and where had they gone? Those who try to study the habits of woodcock will constantly be confronted with questions such as these to which no satisfactory answer can be found.

They are mysterious birds and afford one but rare opportunities of gaining any real insight into their lives. No one quite understands their erratic migrations, their capricious choice of localities, or why, as in this case, woods are full of 'cock one day and almost deserted the next.

Quite outside the ranks of sportsmen and naturalists, it is remarkable how much interest has always been taken in their habits. Even Dr Johnson—perhaps after supping pleasantly off a woodcock on toast—took an opportunity to lay down the law on the subject of their migration. The Doctor maintained that the evidence in favour of the migration of woodcock was so complete that it did not admit of further argument, whereupon one of the company rashly remarked that there had been instances of woodcock being found in summer in Essex. Dr Johnson promptly put him in his place by the crushing rejoinder: "Sir, that strengthens our argument. *Exceptio probat regulam*. Some being found shows that if all remained many would be found."

Woodcock like woods where the timber is neither tall nor closely planted, and where there are plenty of open places with low shrubs and undergrowth. They prefer the sunny side of a slope, and in wet weather they loathe being under dripping trees, but why they favour one covert more than another a few miles away when conditions seem equally attractive in both remains a mystery.

Once 'cock definitely establish themselves in a wood, however, they will return year after year, and of this fact there is much evidence. An instance that came under the writer's notice was of a young woodcock ringed at Baron's Court, Co. Down, in 1905, and shot in the same wood in 1907. Of course this bird may never have migrated, but at any rate it probably visited distant parts of the country during the interval.

Their likes and dislikes are difficult to understand, but when they have made up their minds about a place it is seldom deserted for long. Just as a certain pool in a river is seldom without a salmon, or some boggy patch in a field without a snipe, so, too, there are particular spots in a wood where one can be reasonably certain of finding a woodcock.

I know of many such spots and, as I write, one in particular comes to my mind—just a small clearing in a larch wood, hardly an acre in extent, with scattered clumps of rhododendrons. The undergrowth consists of bramble and bracken, and the ground, where it slopes gently down to a little stream, is covered with soft moss.

Here my spaniel seldom fails to flush a woodcock. I refrain from shooting the birds, and in spring I have my reward, for generally one pair remain behind to nest.

It seems as if there were only a definite and strictly limited number of these "desirable residences." Any vacancy caused by the depredations of sportsmen or other misfortune is immediately filled from the big waiting list among the floating population of migratory and homeless birds.

In the opinion of some authorities, woodcock feed only at night, and seldom or never move by day unless disturbed. But so far as my observation goes they occasionally feed and move about by day. Often, while snipe-shooting, I have put up woodcock in a bog, and these birds, when shot, sometimes have fresh earth on their bills. Once, beside a spring, I surprised a woodcock actually feeding with its long bill sunk deep in the soft ground, waiting for the sensitive nerves at the top of the upper mandible to apprise it of the presence of a worm. Undoubtedly they do most of their flying at night, but, in places where they are numerous, it is no uncommon sight to see them moving about by day. Strange to say, although their eyes are adapted for night work, on very dark nights they are just as averse to fighting to their feeding-grounds as on very stormy ones.

The majority of woodcock found with us during the winter months are migratory, the main flight arriving from Northern Europe early in November and leaving

again in March. Their movements, however, are very dependent on climatic conditions. If hard weather sets in early they may begin to come in from about the middle of October, and in a mild winter begin to leave in February.

Both woodcock and snipe are admirable weather prophets, which is only to be expected, considering what an important part weather plays in their lives and how it influences all their movements.

Migrating woodcock often land on the coasts of Norfolk, Cornwall and the West of Ireland in a very exhausted condition, but, owing to their remarkable recuperative powers, a few days' rest and feeding put them right again. As winter advances many of the birds that land on the East Coast of England continue their migration westward to Ireland and the West of Scotland, where, owing to the milder climate, the country is seldom so frost-bound that a soft spot cannot be found for their bills to probe.

They nest with us in fair numbers, especially in Ireland and Scotland. The nest made on the ground in a wood is artless enough, consisting generally of leaves and withered ferns or grasses, and containing from three to four eggs. The bird is a close sitter, and its protective colouring makes it hard to detect against the surrounding dead leaves and bracken, the dull sombre shades of which seem deliberately chosen with a view to concealment.



Photo : Stanley Crook

" THE WOODCOCK IS A CLOSE SITTER "

A forester once told me of a woodcock which actually hatched out her eggs in a wood where trees were being felled all round. He only by chance discovered the nest in the bracken and noticed the bird, as he expressed it, "sitting there with her great shining eyes looking so beautiful and her bill tucked under her wing—divil a move she made when a big tree fell up agin her."

I have never seen a woodcock sitting with its bill tucked under the wing in this manner, but sometimes the bill is thrust between twigs, as if to render it less conspicuous.

The woodcock's luminous dark eyes, remarkable in being set far back in the head so that it can keep a sharp look-out when its bill is sunk deep in the mud, often betray its presence. Indeed, so closely does the bird's colouring harmonize with the surroundings, and so motionless does it remain while on the ground, that it would otherwise frequently pass unnoticed.

During the incubation period of about three weeks few birds devote themselves more patiently to the monotonous task, and both the male and female take turns to sit on the nest. On the rare occasions when the eggs are left exposed it will be seen that nature has rendered them inconspicuous by tinting them a drab colour blotched with brownish markings.

The nestlings leave the nest almost as soon as they are hatched. From the first they remain absolutely still in the presence of danger, and it would need sharp eyes,

indeed, to discern these little balls of russet fluff in a sombre woodland setting, where there is as yet little hint of spring.

It is now generally admitted that woodcock carry their young from one wood to another, or out to near-by marshes, to feed, but how they actually do so is still a matter of considerable controversy.

It is such a queer, shy bird that years of patient watching often go unrewarded, and then quite unexpectedly one gets a brief glimpse into its home life. Such a piece of good luck fell my way one lovely May afternoon. I was sitting on a mossy bank watching a golden-crested wren's nest in a fir-tree; the young birds were on the point of leaving it and the little parents were hopping about the larches in a terribly agitated frame of mind. Suddenly a woodcock flew past and alighted about thirty yards away. On looking closely at the spot I saw a young woodcock on the ground beside her. Both birds ran about for a few minutes, then the parent suddenly rose with the young one. Owing to the distance away I could not see how she was carrying it. When about ten feet in the air, to my surprise the woodcock hovered for a second, with rapid wing-beats, and let the chick drop. After a violent fluttering the little fellow landed head first on the soft moss. My impression is that the mother was giving her offspring a lesson in confidence and flying. She again alighted beside it, and both started running about in the prettiest way

imaginable. By this time they were quite near me, and the old bird must have become aware of my presence, for she uttered a low croaking note, and the chick immediately ran underneath her. She gave it a few light taps with her bill, as if to make sure it was properly in position, then rose without difficulty, passing right over my head, and carrying the young one between the thighs, pressed close to her breast and clasped firmly in the claws. The bird was flying well and did not seem embarrassed by the extra load it was carrying.

In *Country Life*, of 14th February 1925, the late Sir William MacEwen gave an account of how he observed woodcock carrying their young, which is so interesting and differs so greatly from my experience that I would like to quote it in full.

"On a warm June day," he wrote, "while crossing a lonely moor, I descended into a valley traversed by a burn. On both sides of the burn the ground was covered with high heather and brushwood interspersed with grass-covered knolls. I became aware of the presence of two woodcock by their agitated nursing cries. It was apparent from their excitement that they were tending their nestlings and that I was trespassing upon their preserves.

"I determined to observe their movements and walked toward one of the grass-covered knolls about twenty yards off. I was brought to a standstill by one of the woodcock which, crying shrilly, flew to the knoll

before me, lit on it and went through a series of curious movements. Its long beak was thrust forward toward the ground as if to feed, but, instead of doing so, it drew its beak in towards its breast with a quick movement. This was repeated at intervals, the bird sometimes remaining for a few minutes with its beak resting upon its breast and its head fixed downwards while it watched my movements.

"The possibility of it feeding crossed my mind, but this solution was discarded because woodcock are so shy that they seldom feed when observed. Moreover, the last part of the motion was not like that of feeding, and, thirdly, the bird kept up a constant series of warning cries.

"I took a cautious step or two nearer the hillock, whereupon the bird made several of the same quick movements, as if drawing something with its long beak towards its breast and then trying to hitch it upwards towards its neck. The last movement of the series terminated by the beak being placed flat against its breast and remaining in that position while the neck of the bird was arched and its head bent downwards.

"The bird then rose in the air and flew over my head to a hillock about fifty yards away, the head, neck and beak still in the same stiff, fixed position. The attitude of the bird in flight alone sufficed to attract attention. While it was passing above me I saw what I at first took to be a little twig or thick straw projecting

from under its neck at right-angles to the breast of the bird. The bird maintained this fixed attitude of the neck and head until it lit on the knoll, when something apparently was dropped from its neck, and immediately after the movement of its head became again free.

"The woodcock then began to run about this grass-covered knoll and performed the same movements with its head as were at first observed, only on this occasion similar movements were performed on the two sides of the knoll—first on one side, then on the other, the warning cries being continued as before.

"It was evident that it was tending its young and endeavouring to get two of them to come close together on the knoll a little way off. Occasionally it flew towards its mate and then flew back to look after the other chick which it doubtless had there. Several times the first woodcock took a short flight in a circle over the hillock, and in these short flights the head and neck were free and turned about as one usually sees them.

"I gradually approached this second hillock with the object of seeing the young which I had no doubt were there. I went very slowly and got within about twelve yards of the hillock, the woodcock watching and tending the object before it with its long beak. Several times it tried to get the object fixed to its breast by its beak, and, after succeeding, it ran a few steps forward and then rose in the air and flew over me towards the hillock it was first on.

"This time I had a good look at it as it flew, and saw that its bill was laid very near its breast, its head bent and its neck arched, while from the side of its neck protruded the beak of the young one which it was carrying. It landed on the first hillock, and let the young one drop. The same bird repeated the journey several times between the two hillocks as I approached each in turn.

"Twice it flew so low overhead that the young one was quite visible in its position between the neck of the bird and its breast.

"In order to make quite certain, I determined to try to make the bird drop its young into my hand as it flew over. So, waiting until it was immediately above me, I threw my cap into the air. The bird, startled, lifted its head suddenly and dropped the chick, which fell lightly on to a bunch of heather, where I caught it carefully and examined it. Luckily it was uninjured. It was probably two or three days old.

"I left it in sight of its mother, which picked it up and carried it away when I had retreated. She used her beak as a prehensile organ, gathering the chick by its aid, and lifting it higher on her breast, until it was under her neck, by a series of short, quick, hitching movements. The feet were not used at any time.

"The flight of a woodcock while carrying its young is quite distinctive so far as the attitude of the head

and neck is concerned. The neck is arched, the head stiff and the eyes look downward. Even when turning to look at anything it keeps the head fixed and turns the whole body like a person with a 'crick' in the neck."

The woodcock I saw, however, held her head in the normal flying position, and could move it at will. The neck was not arched and the whole bill was clearly visible, pointing straight downwards. The chick's bill was just discernible, protruding from the parent's breast.

An Irish keeper, who has wonderful opportunities for observing woodcock, as they breed within a mile of his house, told me that he once saw a young one climb upon its mother's back. The old bird then flew away carrying it in this position. I should think that this method would be used for only very short distances.

Probably between the thighs is the usual method, but, like other wild creatures, the woodcock is not bound by hard-and-fast rules, but may carry her chick in several different ways to suit the circumstances of the moment.

Woodcock nest early and begin to pair in February. At the close of one of those warm sunny days which sometimes come early in this month, and always deceive the birds into imagining spring has really arrived, I have seen a woodcock flying up and down the lanes in a wood, croaking like a frog, and performing those extraordinary gyrations in the air which are a sign that the

bird is thinking of the nesting season and probably has paired already. I have found a nest with one egg in it as early as 30th March, and seen young birds just able to fly on 9th May.

It always seems to me such a pity that those who are lucky enough to own good woodcock coverts in Ireland sometimes have a shoot in February, when, undoubtedly, many birds are killed which would otherwise have remained behind to breed. If the close season for woodcock was observed from the middle, or, at any rate, not later than the end, of January, there would be a great increase in the number of birds nesting in these Islands. It must be admitted that a spell of hard weather often comes in February, and with it a chance of a good bag, as migratory woodcock seem then to gather in their favourite haunts before leaving us. Surely, though, a little self-denial is well worth while if thereby such attractive birds can be induced to stay round one's place, and the numbers breeding in the country can be saved from diminishing.

My property is only a small one, but there are one or two spots on it beloved by woodcock, where they are never shot after the middle of January or disturbed when the nesting season comes.

Almost every evening in June, just at dusk, one or two woodcock pass over my garden, with their curious bat-like flight and croaking note, crossing from one wood to another, and often I can just make out that



Photo : Stanley Crook

HATCHING-OUT DAY—AN ANXIOUS MOTHER

the birds are carrying something—probably their young ones—to the feeding-grounds.

While watching woodcock during the summer months, it has often struck me that these home-bred birds appear larger than the migratory woodcock shot in winter. Their plumage, too, seems to be a richer, warmer brown. There is little to distinguish between the male and female of the species, except that the hen is slightly the larger.

I do not believe—at any rate, so far as Ireland is concerned—that woodcock migrate after the nesting season, but they retire very much into the background and are increasingly difficult to find, especially during the moulting period.

An old Irish fable tells how woodcock cross the seas carrying a piece of wood in their claws for use as a raft to rest on during the passage. Woodcock certainly cannot fly for long without food and rest. They are very dependent on weather, and, unless blown out of their course, seldom venture very far from land. Consequently the long migrations made by these birds are apt to be slow and perilous.

When in China I came across an interesting instance of how helpless a woodcock is in bad weather. In that part of the world woodcock spend the winter in the Yangtse Valley and South China, and in the spring migrate north to the trackless forests of the Amur region and Siberia.

On a voyage from Hong-Kong to Wei-hai-wei, in April, when we were about one day out, and in very bad weather, a woodcock took refuge on the fo'c'sle of the ship. The bird was in a very exhausted condition, and every time it attempted to fly away the force of the gale drove it back to the ship again. In time it became resigned to its fate and allowed itself to be caught.

Our Chinese messman, who, like many Celestials, was fond of birds, took charge of the woodcock. He even persuaded the bird to eat some chopped raw meat when it thought no one was looking. The woodcock remained quietly on board for four days, when the weather moderated, and it flew away. The last I saw of it was heading due north for the rock-strewn coast of the Shantung promontory. The messman felt the woodcock's departure keenly. He was most anxious to keep it in a cage as a pet, for, he said, with such a long bill it ought to be able to sing well !

Woodcock always leave a wood by the same gaps, and while waiting for pigeons on a winter's evening I have often noticed them stealing away to their feeding-grounds, which they seldom change.

Indeed, once woodcock settle down in a place they become most regular in their habits. Time after time during the past four years, both in summer and winter, I have seen at dusk two or three woodcock fly across from a wooded glen to some marshy ground on a near-by hillside, and their route never varies by a fraction.

A few instances have been reported of woodcock perching on trees. I have only once seen one doing so, and this was probably unintentional, as the bird had been badly scared by a dog and was trying to extricate itself from thick cover.

There is an indefinable charm about 'cock-shooting, and few who have had much experience of it do not come under its spell. Of course the bird itself is peculiarly attractive, and so are its surroundings. Then a woodcock in cover is a difficult shot. Seldom does one get more than a snap-shot as it twists through the trees, with marvellous ease and speed, or dives headlong into thick cover. Perhaps, however, the chief charm of 'cock-shooting lies in its uncertainty—the big element of luck about it, which, after all, is the essence of true sport. A good day's 'cock-shooting is sufficiently rare to be thoroughly well appreciated when it comes.

Only last season I had a good example of this. On 30th November five of us shooting a Tipperary wood got eleven couple of 'cock. We saw a lot of birds, but, as the keeper put it, "they flew contrariwise," and it must be confessed that the shooting was not up to the mark. There had been a sharp touch of frost the night before and a slight fall of snow on the mountain; this had driven the woodcock into the wood, where the undergrowth was warm and dry. A fortnight later I was shooting in Co. Kilkenny and we saw only four woodcock all day. The bag consisted of one bird,

a sorry one for four guns, with the usual paraphernalia of beaters, etc. The wood was very wet in places, but would certainly hold 'cock in hard weather. Unfortunately, the weather was very mild, and the nights were calm with bright moonlight—the worst possible combination either for 'cock-shooting in covert or for snipe-shooting in a big bog, as the birds are out on the feeding-grounds scattered all over the country. A few days afterwards, when walking over a small hill, I put up no less than twenty snipe and three woodcock out of the heather, and there is no doubt our shoot would have been more successful if we had stuck to the open country. But it is seldom possible to arrange matters so that guns, beaters and woodcock all turn up on the same day.

When once flushed, a woodcock, as a rule, does not fly far, but during its zigzag course between the trees it provides a wonderful variety of baffling shots. In the open, woodcock are not difficult; indeed I have, more than once, in a bad light, mistaken one for a short-eared owl. Yet it is surprising how often the birds are missed, as they fly off at any angle, or if there be a patch of cover near by disappear behind it in the twinkling of an eye.

In 'cock-shooting it is a good rule to fire at the bird immediately on sight, even if you get only a momentary glimpse of a brown streak through the trees. You may not get a better opportunity, and, if you are

lucky enough to do so, there is still the left barrel. In places where the cover is at all dense, No. 8 shot is the best to use. It gives a wide pattern, which is a *sine qua non* in 'cock-shooting. It takes very little to bring a woodcock down, and I have seen one killed at quite forty yards with No. 8. In more open country, or where there is a chance of other game, No. 7 is advisable.

The bag yielded by a hard day's 'cock-shooting might seem small to those accustomed to big battues. Occasionally big bags are obtained in exceptional circumstances—as, for example, when very severe weather drives all the woodcock from the surrounding country into the woods, or, in counties like Norfolk, after the arrival of a big flight of migratory birds. Under normal conditions, however, a party of five or six guns would be well content with fifteen, or at the most twenty, couple of woodcock in a day's covert-shooting.

In the open country four or five couple would be a satisfactory bag for two guns beating up the dykes, ditches, thorn and furze brakes and taking wide sweeps over bogs and heather.

There is little doubt that both snipe and woodcock are scarcer than they were in the old days, and the big bags that were frequently obtained then are no longer possible now, or are at any rate extremely rare.

There are many reasons to account for this. Shooting is, of course, far more universal these days. In Great Britain the type of country that these birds love is getting

year by year more restricted. Climate, too, has something to say to it, I think. Of late years our winters, in Ireland at any rate, seem to consist of a succession of wet, stormy periods, with little or no dry, frosty weather, which is what is wanted for woodcock-shooting. The effect of this on birds like snipe and woodcock, which detest wind and continual rain, is to make them more unsettled, seldom remaining long in any place, but continually shifting their quarters in the hope of better conditions.

Only at very favourite places in these islands—such as Muckross in Co. Kerry—are big bags of forty or fifty couple made nowadays, and this is by no means a frequent occurrence.

The best bag I ever saw made was at Zaverda, near Platæa, in Greece. One day, towards the end of January, a party of six of us landed there from a warship, and assisted by the cheery efforts of some of the crew, who acted as beaters, shot ninety-eight woodcock and forty-five snipe. It seemed a red-letter day then, but I was young at the time and the making of big bags, irrespective of how they were obtained, appears to have been my idea of sport. Looking back on the day now across the years there was very little sport about it. Most of the woodcock were found lying out on the hillsides in the low scrub and bracken. They were very plentiful and very lazy, giving the easiest of shots, a very different proposition to 'cock-shooting in an

Irish wood. Fortunately we ran short of ammunition or we might have gone on murdering all the woodcock in Greece! In spite of my keenness for making records, I remember feeling distinctly relieved, for, to put it mildly, the shooting was a bit on the wild side.

Before the War, Ireland provided some of the best 'cock-shooting in these islands. Good woodcock coverts were carefully preserved by their owners and never disturbed until the day of the shoot. But during the recent troubles many woods were cut down, and others so poached and trespassed over that woodcock deserted them. Now that it is possible to preserve game again, the country offers many opportunities for indulging in this fascinating sport.

Many of us retain happy memories of 'cock-shooting in Ireland in the old days—memories of pleasant shooting parties, of woods full of 'cock, and of beaters who entered into the day's sport with keen enthusiasm, beating the undergrowth vigorously to the tune of "Hi! 'cock! 'cock! 'cock!" When a woodcock was flushed their excitement knew no bounds and the woods resounded with wild yells: "'Cock forward! 'Cock up! 'Cock down! She's gone back!" etc., until the bewildered sportsman did not know where to turn.

I remember on one occasion when three or four woodcock got up together from a small patch under some brambles where the ground was moist, and where they

had evidently been feeding, the excitement of the beaters knew no bounds. "I declare to God they are bawling like a pack of beagles," was how the old keeper aptly described it. One beater, who nearly stood on a rabbit and flushed a woodcock at the same time, was so carried away by his feelings that he threw his stick at the rabbit and his cap at the woodcock. Having thus discharged a right and left, so to speak, he scratched his head in a puzzled way, evidently wondering why he had done it, as he laboriously searched the bushes for them. All this noise is a great help, for, when beating woods for woodcock, provided the beaters keep in a proper line, you cannot have too much of it. The birds lie very close, except on the rare occasions when they are hungry, owing to a succession of dark, stormy nights having prevented their nocturnal visits to the feeding-grounds.

To facilitate shooting it is usual to cut parallel rides, about a hundred yards apart, through the woods. With a party of, say, six guns, three guns go on each ride—one gun with the beaters, one in the middle, and the leading gun well forward, and, towards the end of each beat, heading the drive. It is well to remember that woodcock, on being put up, often take advantage of cover as long as possible and emerge into the open only at the end of the wood.

In places where the cover is dense, or the rides badly kept, the impossibility of seeing the other guns or beaters, and the erratic flight of the woodcock, make



THE BEATER WHO THREW HIS STICK AT A RABBIT AND CAP AT A WOODCOCK

the shooting rather dangerous unless you are used to it. Indeed, often the only safe plan is never to take a low bird.

Some years ago, while woodcock-shooting in Kerry, a sportsman had the misfortune to pepper his father. He is now known to his friends as "Bag-dad." At another shoot I was at, one of the guns happened to be a rather important personage. He was accordingly placed where it was thought he would get the best shooting. Not a single woodcock came out his way, but he was shot in the back by another sportsman. Fortunately it was at long range, still he was stung up pretty severely and had an ear cut by a stray pellet. I felt rather sorry for the perpetrator of the outrage—who had never had any experience of this kind of shooting before—as his profuse apologies were not well received by the victim. Meeting his host afterwards, he again made the usual excuses—he thought it was quite a safe shot, the cover was so thick he could not see, and so on. "Yes, yes," replied that gentleman irritably, "I quite understand, but you need not have chosen Lord ——."

No matter how often one has shot a wood, it is quite impossible to foretell, with any degree of certainty, in what direction woodcock will fly, and the plan usually adopted is to let the guns change places after each beat.

At a shoot I used to go to there was one beat which was particularly good. In this beat it was customary to put one gun on the outside ride, which skirted a bare

hillside. The woodcock, on being flushed, usually kept to the woods, and nine times out of ten this gun had very little to do. One day we had a particularly absent-minded, dreamy sort of man among the party, so it was obvious that this was the place for him. It was a very long beat, cruelly hard work for the beaters through the thick undergrowth, and a very gruelling uphill climb for the guns. On this occasion there were any number of woodcock, and, as luck would have it, nearly all of them went the way of the dreamy sportsman, without a shot being fired. "What happened, didn't you see all the 'cock?" we asked angrily at the end. "No, but I am afraid I was not quite on the *qui vive*," was the gentle answer. What the other guns said about it is quite unprintable.

Walking through the larch woods on some of these remote Irish hillsides the leading gun on a ride has many opportunities of seeing wild creatures disturbed from their nap when the profound silence of the woods is broken by the distant noise of the beaters. One day I saw three foxes, a badger, and a long, low animal, with reddish fur, of which I was unable to get a clear view owing to the thick cover. It may have been a pine-marten, for these animals, although rare, are by no means extinct in Ireland. Recently a labourer near my place saw one of these marten-cats, with two kittens, playing in a wood. The mother picked up one kitten by the scruff of the neck and climbed into a Scotch fir with it, but

the man caught the other. It was kept by a neighbour of mine as a pet, and although at first very shy and savage, it became in the end quite tame, and would play just like an ordinary kitten. It was fed on bread-and-milk to start with, and afterwards on pieces of rabbit or meat. When I saw it the marten was fully grown, with a magnificent pelt, and although it would not come near me it was quite affectionate towards its master.

Badgers are fairly common in Ireland, and are, I am glad to say, generally left alone. The chief complaint hunting people have against the badger is that, no matter how carefully a fox earth may have been stopped, a badger often roots it open again, thus spoiling what might have been a good run. They also suspect these animals of driving foxes away from an earth. This, however, is exceptional, for, as a rule, both badgers and foxes live quite amicably together in the same home. Badgers, too, are most cleanly animals, and when an earth is shared with foxes they are continually at work spring-cleaning and rooting it out afresh. In this way, no doubt, they help to keep foxes healthy and free from mange.

On a fine December day, when the undergrowth is powdered with frost, a larch wood is a very pleasant place to be in. The trees, with their straight grey stems and patches of dull gold on the graceful branches where the pine needles have not yet fallen off, are singularly

beautiful. There is, too, at this time of year, a surprising amount of small bird life about: flocks of long-tailed tits, blue tits and coal tits, twisting and turning round the branches like troops of fairy gymnasts; bullfinches, goldfinches and chaffinches, as well as numbers of migratory gold crests; brown wrens playing hide-and-seek among the bushes, and, of course, the inevitable robin, almost as tame as the gentleman who shares your breakfast at home.

Crossbills seem to be becoming more common in Ireland of late, and on at least three or four occasions between June and November this year (1927) I have seen big flocks of them in larch plantations, clinging to the branches in every conceivable attitude, searching for fir cones. It is most interesting to watch these birds at work, holding the cones firmly in their claws while they tear them open with their powerful bills, with extraordinary rapidity, to get at the seed. So intent are they on the business in hand that one can approach right up to them. Empty cones come raining down in all directions, and every now and then, when the possibilities of the trees around them have been exhausted, the whole flock take wing to another part of the wood, chattering to each other with a low, rather pleasant note.

It is interesting to observe how often it happens that migratory birds make their appearance on the heels of a gale. After a particularly fierce storm, on 28th October 1927, for instance, while going round some



Photo : Stanley Crook

WOODCOCK CHICKS JUST HATCHED

woods in Co. Kilkenny to see what damage had been done, I noticed a flock of upwards of a hundred cross-bills. Golden plover kept passing overhead in immense numbers, and I heard the first wild geese of the year.

A man who was out cub-hunting that day told me that, while drawing a small covert, the hounds put out no less than five woodcock.

With signs of hard weather coming, but before the frost has really set in, two or three guns can often get a nice day's 'cock-shooting, by beating up the dykes, ditches and stray bits of cover outside the woods. One or two obedient cocker-spaniels, able to hunt through any cover, are a great help for this kind of work.

Owing to the difficulty of finding dead birds in undergrowth, well-trained retrievers and spaniels are very useful while covert-shooting, but unless they are well trained, and accustomed to being used solely for retrieving, they are much better left at home.

On one occasion, shooting a famous wood in Co. Cork, we had a spaniel and retriever with us. Unfortunately, we were also accompanied from the village by one of the most curious-looking mongrels I have ever seen. In the distance it appeared to be principally sheep-dog, with strong strains of greyhound and Irish terrier. I was unable to get a close-up view, as a lifetime's experience in the gentle art of evading stones had taught it to keep well out of range. As we lined

up to commence shooting, the mongrel took advantage of the cover to creep up and join the fun. Before long, wild, hysterical shrieks announced the fact that it had discovered a rabbit. The excitement was contagious. The spaniel and retriever, although previously vouched for by their owners as perfectly trained, lost no time in joining in the chase, and soon the woods resounded to the music of the pack. Before the irate owners could catch their dogs the best part of the covert had been ruined. As the mournful cries of the chastised ones rent the air the mongrel quickly took the hint, and the last I saw of it was disappearing over a ditch with most of the briars of the wood adhering to its shaggy coat.

For shooting in open country I have found a pointer excellent, and very steady on woodcock. Well-trained setters are also good and have the additional advantage of ranging over more country. Occasionally one comes across both pointers and setters which at first absolutely refuse to acknowledge the scent of a woodcock, but, as a rule, after some experience of finding these birds, they become very keen.

Delightful days can be had over dogs in wild moorland districts, like Connemara, where, during mild weather, woodcock lie out in fair numbers in the heather and bogs. It is true that the bag seldom consists of more than a few couple, but then snipe, golden plover and wild-fowl add variety to it.

In places where the woodcock is somewhat of a *rara avis* its occasional appearances at a shoot are very welcome, and a subject of keen interest to sportsmen. I remember being at a pheasant shoot in Berkshire where the chief topic of conversation in the smoking-room afterwards was neither the height of the pheasants, nor the size of the bag, but a woodcock which was neatly accounted for by one of the guns, while flitting ghost-like through the woods, barely visible against the browns and greys on a dull November day.

CHAPTER THREE

DUCK, PLOVER, GEESE

IN spite of the attentions of poachers a fair number of mallard and teal succeed in rearing their broods in Irish bogs, and in winter their numbers are greatly augmented by migratory wild-fowl, including widgeon, pintail, pochard, gadwall and shovelers.

When shooting a bog where there is a chance of meeting duck it is often hard to decide on the best plan of action, because these birds are generally found on reed-fringed ponds and very wet places right in the middle of it. To get at them means crossing much of the best snipe-ground. Although sorely tempted, I have often refrained from firing at snipe so as not to disturb the duck, only to find that in the end the duck rose out of range, for it is impossible to wade through water and rushes without noise. The chance of bagging a few couple of snipe is thus thrown away for nothing. On the other hand, to fire at snipe may mean that all the duck get up at the first shot, and, after circling the bog at a great height to discover the cause of the disturbance, make off to some more peaceful retreat for the day. It is rather a case of Hobson's choice!

When I was a boy the chance of a shot at "them



Photo : Stanley Crook

A PAIR OF MALLARD AND FEMALE WIDGEON ON A FROZEN LAKE

heavy duck " outweighed everything else, and I often ended by disturbing the whole bog, only to return sadly homeward without either duck or snipe in the bag. I still find wild-fowl wonderfully exciting, but, with the attainment of years of discretion, I now refuse to be led into ruining a day's snipe-shooting for the very doubtful chance of a shot at duck, and take the bog as it comes. In this way I often find that, although the noise of my shooting at snipe puts up most of the duck, a few are frightened into the shelter of the reeds, and on approach they rise within easy range.

On very windy days, if the bog is a big one and a favourite resort of wild-fowl, good sport can sometimes be had by stationing the guns at various strategic points and keeping the birds on the move. I remember that on one bog, which in winter generally became a vast sheet of water owing to a river overflowing its banks, it was the custom for the guns to be rowed out and posted in poplars and other trees sticking up out of the water. On a stormy day wild-fowl in great numbers and variety kept flying back and forth across the waters. The spot was certainly good, but it was bitterly cold work perched in a tree.

Flighting is ever an uncertain sport, but near the sea-coast wild-fowl generally have a definite line of flight to and from their feeding-grounds, and, once this has been discovered, it simply becomes a question of whether they will fly within range or not. But the duck which

inhabit an inland bog may not leave it at all at flight-time, or, if they do, they seldom follow the same route two days running. Still, there is always a great fascination in being out on the marshes at dusk.

Just as when you are waiting for pigeons in a wood the time is beguiled by certain familiar and pleasant sounds: the sighing of the wind in the trees, the frightened shrieking of a blackbird at the approach of night, the sweet evensong of a robin, the distant cawing of rooks on their way to bed, a noise like the passing of an express train as, with a sudden rush of wings, a flock of starlings come overhead bound for the laurels, and the clatter of pigeons as they drop into the firs—so, too, on a bog there is much to interest one: the shrill piping of small water-birds in the reeds, the cry of a snipe as it makes its evening flight, the forlorn wail of a peewit, the screech of a heron flapping wearily across the wastes, and, best of all, the fat, contented quack of a mallard stretching his wings preparatory to flight.

It is often at harvest-time that there is the best chance of sport, for if ducks find cornfields to their liking they will visit them night after night. On a dark, stormy evening ducks flight early and drop into the nearest cornfields, but in fine weather they go much farther afield, and if there is a moon prefer to wait for it. They are then in no hurry to commence feeding, circling the fields

several times before landing and giving the guns many opportunities.

It is a fascinating form of shooting. First, there is a distant quack in the night, and just when you begin to think they must have passed on to another field there is a swish of wings and the duck are over you, their black forms silhouetted sharply against the sky. A hurried right-and-left is followed by a terrific quacking as, with a rush of wings, the duck hurl themselves straight upward and curl away at top speed. There is seldom long to wait before the next lot comes in—often barely time to pick up dead birds.

Of course this shooting entirely depends on your being lucky enough to find the particular cornfields the duck feed on, and this is not so difficult if their line of flight be observed for a few evenings. A good crop of barley—or the stubble later on—anywhere near a bog generally proves irresistible.

On marshes near the sea the morning flight is usually the best, as it lasts much longer and the light is improving all the time, but so far as my experience goes being out at dawn on inland bogs has seldom resulted in anything beyond acute discomfort. Sometimes the duck do not come in at all, but spend the day resting on small ponds and outlying marshes. At other times they fly at a great height before landing on the bog at a point miles from where you have taken up your position.

Of course, where there is a large lake or sheet of water on which wild-fowl are known to rest by day, it is a different matter. By hiding in the reeds you can get some pretty shooting, as the duck keep coming in, dropping into the water in small parties.

There are still a few big well-preserved bogs in the Irish Free State which provide first-rate fighting, because there are always any number of duck on them, and the habits of the birds are well known.

A good example is Lord Castletown's bog, near Abbeyleix, in Queen's County—perhaps the best inland one in Ireland—where a bag of over a hundred duck in a morning's fighting used to be nothing unusual. Here the guns await fighting time comfortably stationed in watertight barrels, sunk in the bog, concealed by rushes, and provided with a diagram on which the position of fallen birds can be marked roughly—an excellent idea which greatly facilitates the difficult job of picking them up afterwards.

There are thousands of acres of bogland and water, and a large part is set aside as a bird sanctuary; a very wise plan on any duck shoot, because the birds soon get to know that they have a safe refuge and never go far away in consequence. In the breeding season a sanctuary like this can be a never-failing source of interest and pleasure to its fortunate owner. If there were only more of such sanctuaries the stock of birds breeding in these islands would soon increase.

Towards the dusk of a winter's day big flocks of golden plover can generally be seen circling the hills around a bog with tireless energy. Every now and then, as if actuated by a common impulse, they sweep towards the ground, only to rise again immediately. The whizzing of the rapid beats of their wings can be heard a long distance off. These birds spend the day feeding on ploughed fields and waste lands, and at night retire to roost on bare, stony patches among the heather. While on the wing they call to each other incessantly, with a melancholy whistling note, which is very attractive when heard among such surroundings.

Many a local fowler is able to imitate their whistle very closely, and in this way can attract a big flock of plover so that they wheel round him time after time, affording an opportunity for a murderous shot into the brown, or of netting them in large numbers.

When they approach the haunts of man, golden plover are very wary. They generally pitch right in the centre of a ploughed field, and at a distance the golden-flecked plumage of their backs and greyish white under parts harmonize perfectly with the newly upturned earth. Indeed, were it not for their call, and their restless habit of circling a field time after time before landing, they would often pass unnoticed in the countryside. Their insatiable curiosity sometimes causes them to come within range, especially if one is accompanied by a dog, and, even if they pass overhead out

of range, a shot fired in the air will often make them swerve swiftly downward, giving a chance for the left barrel.

When golden plover are on the lonely upland moors of Scotland and Ireland in the breeding season they are tame enough, and appear only too anxious to attract attention by running along the ground, flying a short distance, and landing again just in front of you. Their efforts are rendered easier by the brilliant black waistcoats which denote their summer plumage. If you refuse to respond to their tricks—which are only designed to draw you away from their nests—and search the ground very carefully, you may be rewarded by finding three or four golden balls of down, half buried in the moss. The protective colouring, however, is so perfect that the chances are the nestlings will remain undiscovered.

Golden plover are frequently confused with grey plover, and certainly these birds, especially in their first year, are very similar, but there are points of distinction. The axillaries of grey plover are black, and of golden plover white. Grey plover have a rudimentary hind-toe, while golden plover have none at all. Also, it must be remembered that grey plover are birds of the mud-flats and are seldom found far from a tidal estuary.

During the past few seasons, golden plover have been especially numerous in many parts of Ireland. In their favourite haunts in Co. Cork I noticed immense



Photo : J. Kershare

" WE CAN ILL AFFORD TO LOSE THE LAPWING, ESPECIALLY IN SPRING "

"stands" of them, and friends have told me that through the West generally it has been the same. One misses, though, the big flocks of green plover which usually accompanied them. This attractive bird, which used to be so common in Ireland, is becoming scarcer every year, and few now breed in the country. In England some people blame the gourmets for this decrease, in the same way as they accuse the grey squirrel of having ousted the native animal. There may be gourmets in Ireland—not many, I should imagine, to judge from the general standard of cooking—but I never heard of plovers' nests being robbed for their benefit.

There are certainly no grey squirrels in the country, yet one scarcely ever sees the red squirrel nowadays in woods where five or six could have been counted during an afternoon's walk some years ago.

Perhaps some dire disease, of which we know nothing, has ravaged these species. Whatever the reason, we can ill afford to lose the lapwing, especially in spring—or the squirrel either, in spite of the damage it does to young trees.

During the winter of 1927-1928 I saw more lapwings in the South and West of Ireland than for many years. But most of these birds were only visitors due to the severe weather in England in December, which drove them to milder regions in search of food. I heard of one shot in Co. Kildare marked "Witherby, Holborn." There is little doubt that the wonderful

Atlantic flight made about the same time by nearly a hundred lapwings to Newfoundland was no migration. Probably these birds were the sole survivors from a flock of thousands driven far out in the Atlantic by gales while on passage to Ireland. On reaching the coast of Newfoundland in an exhausted state one of these heroic adventurers was received with the greeting that a certain class of sportsman invariably metes out to strange birds, and on its leg was a ring marked "Ullswater, Cumberland, 5/1926," so it is possible to identify this bird as one of several ringed after leaving the nest by Dr Moon, a keen naturalist, near Ullswater, in May 1926.

No bird is more worthy of our protection than the lapwing, and no bird has a better right to the title of farmer's friend. The number of wireworms and other pests it consumes in the course of a year is prodigious.

Another old friend that I miss on my walks is the hedgehog. My terrier invariably used to find one of these animals, gingerly carry the prickly ball long distances to lay at my feet, and then bark hysterically round it, but it is rare indeed to see one now.

One of the most attractive pets I had as a boy was one of these animals, which became quite tame. One night a rather nervous lady who was staying in the house thought she heard someone under her bed. Probably it was one of the dogs that had taken refuge there to avoid being put out in the kennel. At all events she ran out of

the room on to the landing in her nightdress, and promptly stepped on the hedgehog, which had somehow or other found its way there. Her subsequent yells roused the whole household, and the next morning she announced caustically at breakfast that she would much prefer spending the night in the Zoo, as at any rate the animals there were confined to cages!

Vast stretches of bogland—like the Bog of Allen and the wild moorlands of the West Coast of Ireland—are visited in winter by large numbers of grey-lag and white-fronted geese, which arrive about the end of October and remain as late as April. Once, travelling by train through part of the Bog of Allen, in May, I saw several pairs of grey-lag from the carriage window. They are said to breed occasionally in Ireland, and I think these birds must have had nests near by, although, so far as I know, no actual instance has been recorded of their doing so, except in a semi-wild state at Castle Coole. While crossing bogs, or visiting lonely mountain tarns near their winter haunts in the West of Ireland, I have often searched in vain for their nests.

A farmer who lives near the Bog of Allen told me of a curious experience with wild geese. He keeps a big flock of tame geese which spend the day on a field in the centre of which there is a small pond. Every winter vast numbers of wild geese passed over this field on their way to and from the bog. They usually flew at a great height, and never alighted on his land until one day,

during a spell of very hard weather, fifteen grey-lag geese landed near the pond. Probably they were attracted by the tame geese, for they immediately began to fraternize with them. The wild geese remained on the farm for nearly a week. At dusk, when his geese waddled back to the farm-buildings to sleep, their wild companions accompanied them to within a hundred yards of the house. On one occasion they actually came inside the farmyard gate and allowed the farmer's wife to come right up to them before taking wing.

As is usually the case when wild creatures put their trust in man or any of his works, disaster was not long in overtaking the geese. One evening the farmer's son lay in wait for them behind a hedge, and as they came past, following the tame geese up from the field, he bagged two. Fortunately he was armed only with a single-barrel gun or the grey-lags might have paid a heavier penalty for their misplaced confidence. But it was quite enough to teach them a bitter lesson, and they flew away never to come back again.

Bean-geese are comparatively rare in Ireland. On one occasion a pair flew over my head when I was shooting snipe on a Cork bog. I shot one, and for long afterwards its mate kept flying round, calling in a melancholy way, and I felt as if I had committed some dreadful crime.

Somewhere or other I read an article by W. H. Hudson in which he wrote : " I can eat sheep and pig and some

other beasts, always excepting cow ; also fowl, pheasant and various other birds, both wild and tame, but I draw the line at wild geese. I would as soon eat a lark or a quail, or a nice plump individual of my own species, as this wise and noble bird."

I am afraid I draw the line at wild geese chiefly because, unless they happen to be young birds, they are apt to be extremely tough ; also I must confess that I can seldom resist an opportunity of goose-shooting.

To the true wild-fowler there is an irresistible appeal about this sport, involving, as it so often does, incredible patience and hardship. As he crouches in the reeds at flighting time the distant music of a gaggle under way invariably causes him to grip his gun tighter. He will also cheerfully brave a winter's night for the chance of a shot. But those who love this splendid bird can find some consolation in reflecting that the toll taken by sportsmen is indeed small, as nature has endowed it with marvellous powers of looking after itself.

By day it is generally impossible to get within range of geese on a bog, as they invariably choose the most inaccessible spot in the centre to rest in. They are, however, very interesting to watch through glasses. Some appear sound asleep, head tucked under wing, others are making an elaborate toilet. Each flock has sentries posted so that every point from which danger might come is kept under constant observation. On one

occasion, noticing that some children driving a donkey with a turf creel on its back were allowed to get within easy range, I tried to approach a flock by crouching on the blind side of the donkey. I managed to get within a hundred yards of them when the sentry spotted something suspicious about the donkey's stockinged legs and gave a low cackle. Instantly every head was up, and with a deafening noise the whole flock of over one hundred geese took to wing.

On a big bog geese usually have several favourite resting-places, and if disturbed from one will make for another. By observing them for a time it is often possible to get some idea of their movements and to organize a drive by constructing "a hide" on their probable line of flight and then sending a man to put the birds up. He should be carefully instructed to keep out of sight until the right moment and to take a wide sweep round the geese. More often than not, I am afraid, the geese will tower to a great height and go away altogether, filling the air with indignant abuse at such an uncalled-for intrusion on their peace and solitude. Still, there is a chance of a right-and-left, especially on a very windy day, when they fly low and do not like leaving the bog.

It takes much experience before one realizes what a deceptive bird a goose is in flight, as, owing to its size and measured wing-beats, it appears to be travelling much slower than is really the case. The body is so

well protected by down and feathers that shot simply rattles off it, and the only really vulnerable parts are the head and neck. The best plan is to aim at the head, swinging the gun well forward at the moment of pulling the trigger. Easier said than done, perhaps, as when the geese come over one is usually lying prone in a ditch or crouching in the reeds.

The whole secret of success lies in keeping absolutely still; the slightest movement beforehand so as to get into a more comfortable shooting position will cause the geese to become suspicious and, as a result, they will veer off to the right or left and so pass out of range.

It is cruel, and generally useless, to fire at geese with a 12-bore, even when loaded with big shot, unless they are well within range, and with such big birds this is difficult to judge, especially in a bad light. One is often tempted to take shots which are at least sixty yards or more away, because geese seem to be so much nearer than they really are. Also it must be admitted that it is hard to resist taking a long shot at geese, for it is generally only after hours of patient waiting or arduous stalking that one gets any chance at them at all.

Once geese settle down for winter, their habits become most regular. Every evening they will flight from the bogs to neighbouring farms to feed. On dark evenings they flight early, but when there is a moon they will

wait for it, and this is the sportsman's best chance, as, like duck, they are in no hurry, but keep coming in in faggles at regular intervals. On a wild winter's night, when stretched in front of a huge turf fire after a hard day's snipe-shooting, it takes a lot to dig a man out of doors again, but once the move is made it is well worth it. Perhaps it has been ascertained beforehand that the geese pass over a shoulder of a hill near the lodge. When you take up your post there, the moon is just rising and the dark bog stretches below with silver dots here and there where the light is reflected on the water. The beauty and loneliness of it are beyond expression. Suddenly, above the noise of the wind, comes the faint cackling of the geese gradually drawing nearer, until your excitement becomes intense, as, with a veritable babel of noise, they are upon you. One hurried shot, and with incredible speed the big birds tower straight up into the sky, hurl themselves back into the wind, and return whence they came with angry cackling. Then you settle down to await the next lot. A really successful night may mean four or five geese. More often they will pass out of range and you will draw a blank. But the next night that the wind is in the right quarter the subtle challenge of the geese winging their V-shaped way from the bogs will once more tear you away from the fireside to try your luck again.

CHAPTER FOUR

WILD PHEASANTS

THERE are not many estates in the Irish Free State where pheasants are reared in any number, but in some districts it used to be possible to pick up a brace or so of wild birds in the course of a day's rough shooting.

Unfortunately poaching has been so prevalent these late years that to see a pheasant at all in the country nowadays is very rare.

Around my small property in Co. Kilkenny, in spite of intermittent poaching in and out of season, wild pheasants have managed to exist. On it there is almost everything that would most appeal to them in the wild state: a few acres of straggling woodland with brambly undergrowth, marshes with tall rushes and reeds, plenty of coarse seed-bearing grasses, gorse scattered everywhere, and big, unkempt hedgerows. In short, but for a field or so of oats, roots and cabbages, the place, like the pheasants, is left to run entirely wild.

For the pheasants' special benefit I used to cultivate a small patch of buckwheat in a clearing of the wood. This crop is easy to grow and is very attractive to pheasants. It does well in almost any land, however poor. The ground should be roughly ploughed and

harrowed, and sown in May, with about four bushels of seed to the acre. The crop will then ripen about October and continue until severe frosts set in. Pheasants remain around the buckwheat long after all the seed is eaten, and not only do they show no inclination to stray, but the few stragglers on neighbouring farms that have escaped the attention of poachers return to the fold.

In districts where pheasant-rearing is carried out on a large scale, and shoots adjoin each other, the planting of buckwheat might quite reasonably be regarded as a poacher's trick—almost on a par, in fact, with the use of aniseed—and, unless the practice were universally adopted, the man who grew it on his property would certainly not be popular. For small estates, however, in remote places, it is a valuable crop for keeping pheasants at home under their owner's eye. Another useful plant is the Jerusalem artichoke. Pheasants are particularly fond of the tubers, and it will grow quite well in coverts.

Rearing pheasants is a troublesome and costly business, and not worth while unless done on a large scale, which means employing keepers. I have tried to rear a few clutches of pheasants under hens, but as I could not look after them myself it generally meant that, during my absence, lack of care, rats, disease, or some other misfortune, wiped out the lot.

The simple and comparatively cheap plan of turning

out a few hens after the shooting season in order to keep up the proportion of about one cock to five or six hens does not seem to be fully appreciated. It is peculiarly adapted to small estates where no keepers are employed. Of course it must be remembered that the percentage of casualties amongst the young birds when reared in a wild state is a high one. A hen which succeeded in rearing five or six young pheasants would have done exceedingly well.

During many lawless years I found it impossible to preserve my pheasants, and the numbers dwindled to about three cocks and two hens. Apart from the welcome addition that an occasional pheasant makes to the bag, and incidentally to the menu, when they have once been round a place it is extraordinary how you miss them. You miss the brave sight of an old cock-pheasant stealing out in the evening from the edge of a wood to feed on the stubble, his merry crow in spring, and most of all in the early mornings when, on looking out of your bedroom window, you could sometimes see him on the lawn in front of the house. Such things give pleasure at the time, and in your mind they become deeply associated with the place.

So, in order gradually to renew the stock, I bought and liberated six hen-pheasants last February (1927). The results exceeded my most sanguine expectations, for when October came round there were certainly thirty, and probably more, pheasants on the farm.

In China it is remarkable how pheasants (*P. torquatus*) thrive in every variety of climate, ranging from the tropical heat of South China to the rigours of the Far North. I have shot them in the bamboo groves of the South and in the reed beds and richly cultivated plains of the Yangtse region, and have met the same pheasant again also in the mountains surrounding the Imperial Hunting Park, Jehol, in Mongolia, where it interbreeds with the handsome Mongolian pheasant, and, for hardihood and sporting purposes, provides one of the best of the many pheasant crosses. Perhaps it may be of interest to note the various kinds of cover and feeding which appeal to pheasants in their native haunts. In many parts of the Yangtse Valley, trees and undergrowth are very scarce, and huge reed beds form the principal cover. I have seen pheasants coming out of the reeds literally in hundreds, thanks to the vigorous efforts of the crew of a gunboat who volunteered to act as beaters. These reeds, although situated in swamps, provide dry and warm cover. Also, there is generally good feeding near by—ricefields, Indian corn, millet, wheat, beans, and other crops, interspersed with mulberry bushes, grown for silkworms. Pheasants are found often in the mulberry patches, as these shrubs harbour plenty of grubs. In short, the pheasants of the Yangtse have abundant food, with good cover and water near at hand.

Farther South, the bamboo groves generally have

an undergrowth of thorn, brambles, wild rose, ferns, and tall seed-bearing grasses. Among the berried shrubs I noticed the guelder rose, spindle-wood and snowberry.

In north and central China the mountains are, in places, covered with low shrub of the berries of which pheasants are very fond. This shrub resembles the American Partridge Berry (*Gaultheria Shallon*), which grows profusely in the West of Scotland, and is when in berry a sure find for pheasants. Chinese hills are sometimes clothed with scrub-oak and the acorns and various forms of gall on the leaves are favourite foods at certain seasons. Mountain ash, bilberries and raspberries grow in plenty; so, with many seed-bearing grasses and insect life of every kind, it will be seen that the pheasant in its natural environment seldom lacks a liberal and varied diet.

The pheasants, although quite independent of man, are not averse to coming down from their retreats to feed on the crops which the Chinese, by dint of ceaseless toil, have won from the hillsides. When snow covers the mountains the pheasants migrate down to the plains in search of food and shelter. In the Amur region the birds retire into the dense forests and seem to have no difficulty in surviving the terrible winters, although what they feed on is a mystery.

Near villages one often comes across old family burial-grounds with curious mound-shaped graves covered

with brambles, honeysuckle and coarse grasses, and surrounded by a ring of ivy-covered trees and holly. Here pheasants like to roost, and I have seen them with the village chickens at dawn breakfasting off the grain scattered round a threshing-floor.

Except a foreign market for game be near at hand the natives seldom interfere with pheasants, but vermin of all kinds abound—foxes, civet-cats, weasels, and in some parts snakes capable of swallowing a sitting hen, eggs and all. Every village has a nest or two of magpies, for the Chinese share the common belief that these birds bring luck. Other members of the crow tribe are not widely distributed in China, but hawks, both large and small, are everywhere. In spite of all, however, pheasants thrive amazingly, and their only serious enemy is man.

Since my day I am told that cold-storage companies have established depôts in China, and, until the recent troubles, sent steamers regularly up the Yangtse. The natives were supplied with cheap guns and cartridges and were told to shoot pheasants, which were bought from them in and out of season. The birds were then placed in cold-storage and shipped home with Chinese pork and other luxuries. In many districts round the Treaty Ports where there used to be any number of pheasants scarcely one now is to be seen. The golden pheasant of the Upper Yangtse has been almost wiped out in the quest for its beautiful plumage.

While on the subject of China, I would like to tell of

the unfortunate contretemps which happened to a most respectable old gentleman with whom I was pheasant-shooting near Shanghai. I found him in a village surrounded by Chinese. The youth of the village were inclined to jeer at him, but the village elders were shaking their heads and saying how dreadful it was that "foreign devils," even with grey hair, continued to lead immoral and dissolute lives. My knowledge of the local dialect was scanty, and it took me a long time to get at the meaning of it all. The only offence my friend had committed was to ask if there were any pheasants in the neighbourhood. In most parts of China the Chinese for pheasant is "Yeh Ch'ih," which means "wild chicken." The Chinese language, however, is full of pitfalls, and in this particular district the words "Yeh Ch'ih" are used solely for describing ladies who are not quite—well, not quite. Thus an entirely erroneous construction was put on the old gentleman's harmless question.

P. torquatus has been introduced into many parts of the world with great success. In St Helena, for example, the birds were first introduced by the Portuguese in 1513, and have flourished down to recent times with but little change of plumage. There is plenty of cover on the island—low scrub on the hills, berry-bearing shrubs, seeds in abundance, and plains of tufted cow-grass.

On a few estates in England during the past few

years there has been a welcome return to favour of the old English pheasant (*P. colchicus*). For many years this gallant bird has been but a memory in most parts of the country—a memory of the good old days of Joseph Mantons and buskins. The pure breed, untainted by any cross, is very rare, though occasionally met with in remote districts. The cock is readily distinguished from the Chinese pheasant by the absence of a white collar round his neck, the intense blackness of the plumage on the lower belly, and the maroon colour of the rump, with purple gloss and no trace of grey. *P. colchicus* is also a trifle smaller.

All pheasants, especially wild ones, excel in running along the ground before taking to wing, and are apt to wander far afield. *P. colchicus* has been unjustly cursed by some for these faults, but he is no whit worse than his Chinese brother. When once really under way his flight is, if anything, more rapid, and gourmets maintain that, when his time comes for bread sauce, he is a better eating bird than any other pheasant.

Of course the moment *P. colchicus* and *P. torquatus* are brought into contact they begin to interbreed. The strain of *P. torquatus* comes out more strongly in the cross, and the result is the common ring-necked pheasant of the British Isles.

Wild pheasants nest from the end of April onwards, and usually lay eight or nine eggs. Hedgerows, the

undergrowth in woods, clumps of tall grasses or patches of dry reeds in marshes are favourite spots, and frequently little or no trouble is taken to conceal the nest. Several instances have occurred of pheasants nesting in trees; sometimes an old pigeon's nest or squirrel's drey is appropriated.

In spring there are few pleasanter tasks for a country lover than locating pheasants' nests, for, when thus engaged, he is bound to see much of interest besides. Care must be taken not to disturb the sitting hens, as they are liable to desert the eggs on little provocation. By knowing where the nests are, it is possible not only to form a good idea of what the season will be like, but also to give the birds a certain amount of protection from their enemies at this critical time.

In your rambles round the estate, it is a good rule always to carry a gun. It often happens that just on the very day on which you have not got one a sparrowhawk glides out from a fir-tree right in front of you, a stoat pops out of a ditch, or the old "hoodie" crow which you have been stalking for weeks flies over your head within easy range.

Poaching cats, stoats, weasels and rats are some of the worst enemies. Foxes, of course, cannot be touched in a hunting country. Fortunately, sitting pheasants, like other game birds at this time, give out very little scent — some say none at all — so that unless a fox actually blunders on a nest the chances are that he

never finds it. Foxes, too, devote most of their attention to rabbits, and, unlike cats, are not always engaged in stealing up and down the hedgerows searching for nests and birds.

So far as the eggs are concerned, crows—the carrion and the hooded crow (the latter bird is unfortunately on the increase in Ireland)—are by far the worst offenders; then come magpies and jays. Unless they have actually got the habit of stealing eggs, and are hard pressed for food, I do not think rooks do much damage; besides, we must accept rooks as part of the countryside. To destroy a rookery would be a dreadful crime, and these birds do a great deal of good on the farm by eating wireworm and other pests. Kestrels are undoubtedly a great enemy to the pheasant-rearer when the chicks are out in coops, but I do not think that kestrels do much damage to wild pheasant chicks. With the sparrowhawk it is another story, however, and it should not be spared.

Young wild pheasants are very hardy, and suffer from few of the ills that attack pheasants when bred in confinement. Gapes and, in a wet season, pneumonia are the worst dangers. They require a great deal of insect and other food. Ant-eggs are a valuable diet for them, and in woods where there are plenty of pine needles I have generally noticed big ants' nests. Later on, the pheasant families consume an enormous number of grubs and wireworms; indeed, many naturalists try to

prove that pheasants, like rooks, should be called the farmer's friends, but the farmer himself is not so sure about it.

He who can bring down a high-driven pheasant with the wind behind it is apt to be scornful of the man who hunts the hedgerows with a spaniel and pots an occasional cock as he rises in all his glory. It must be admitted that it is sometimes very like murder, but there are extenuating circumstances. Unless the number of wild pheasants is very large, only the cocks are shot. As the year advances, an old cock-pheasant gets very clever and gives many an opportunity for good dog-work. He runs along the ground and doubles like a hare, and when he eventually does rise, as often as not it is on the wrong side of the hedge or out of range. A day's rough shooting seldom means more than a few brace of pheasants in the bag, for there is generally much else to be done besides. Perhaps it is an odd covey of partridges to be searched for with a pointer, a pond which must be stalked for duck, marshy fields to be worked for snipe, or a long overdue attack to be made on pigeons and rabbits for the *ménage*. When the day is over you feel that the mixed bag, however small, has been well earned, and that you have enjoyed it all perhaps more than many a battue.

Far be it from me, however, to decry the big battue. If pheasants were not reared and preserved on a large scale they would be scarce enough in the countryside.

Also, no one will deny that, on a well-managed shoot, driven pheasants demand the highest skill. Indeed, for this very reason, I would like to suggest that the guns should be limited to men who are first-class shots and who know the business, otherwise the number of tailed and wounded birds is very large.

CHAPTER FIVE

TIM MURPHY'S SHOOT

AFTER years of unwholesome excitement and misery, one of the best signs that life is becoming normal again in the Irish Free State is that we are once more settling down to the "trivial round, the common task." One of my "common tasks" is a thorn hedge running along the bottom of the garden, which had taken advantage of long neglect to burst into extravagant growth. One mellow October afternoon I was slashing away in an heroic attempt to keep it within reasonable limits when suddenly Tim Murphy's face—large, red, good-humoured—appeared through a gap. Murphy is a tenant of mine, and a very decent fellow. The only objection I have to him is that he seldom pays his rent. Gripping me cordially by the hand, he inquired after me and mine, or, to use his expressive phrase—"How is all your 'care'?" Then, having fulfilled the ample requirements of Irish courtesy, he sank his voice to a whisper—a sure sign he had news of importance to impart—and told me that the hills round his place "do be alive with game," and that I ought to come out at once before "that divil Cody"—a notorious poacher—"had them all shot." Murphy, like all his kind, has, to put it mildly,

a tendency to exaggerate. Still, a ramble over the hills with gun and dog is always enjoyable, so early next day I set out for his farm.

It was a frosty morning, and at first autumn mists veiled the countryside. Later on the sun made a welcome appearance, and as its strength increased the mists gradually dispersed, disclosing the soft outlines of the hills. Soon, save for a white ribbon of fog which hid the course of a stream down in the valley, the whole country was laid out before me — moorland waste and bogs meeting tillage field and pasture where the few farms nestled in sheltered spots beneath the hillsides.

Along the road the hedgerows were a mass of crimson berries, and from them missel-thrushes, reluctant to leave the feast, flew out with indignant clatter. Large flocks of fieldfares and noisy starlings were busy breakfasting in the fields, and from high overhead came the wild, musical whistling of golden plover—sure heralds of winter's approach.

Turning up the steep lane that led to Murphy's farm, I was met at the gate by the owner himself, with the usual half-starved-looking Irish setter dog. Before starting operations, he insisted on my "taking a drop," in that dreadful apartment common to all big farmhouses, where plush chairs, antimacassars, stuffed pheasants and hermetically sealed windows all combine to produce gloom. If you are not very careful on these occasions,

your kindly host will fill your glass with neat whisky and feel quite hurt if you do not drain it.

The hill below the farm is covered with gorse, and in this prickly fastness, from time immemorial, a few pheasants have managed to exist in spite of poachers and vermin. Here my cocker-spaniel got to work, and, although principally occupied in chasing rabbits, finally succeeded, assisted by Murphy, in rattling out an old cock-pheasant. In his excitement, Murphy threw his stick at the bird and I fired both barrels. The pheasant sailed down the hill quite untouched by the warmth of his reception. This was a bad beginning and Murphy was justifiably annoyed. Pheasants in Ireland are rare enough; to get a shot at them is still rarer. The only excuse was that at the moment when the pheasant rose I was engaged in painfully extricating myself from a furze bush. It took us some time to recover from this reverse and decide on the next move—a covey of partridges which were reported to be in Jamsey Walsh's turnips. On the way a snipe zigzagged over a hedge and in a second was lost to sight and to the game-bag. In a boggy field another gave a comparatively simple shot and saved the day from all danger of being a blank one. With rising spirits we tried the turnip-field, but the partridges were not at home. Unfortunately Jamsey Walsh was in, and escape impossible without partaking of his hospitality.

Remote enough are the chances of finding a covey

over a big country of bogs, furze and heather, with only here and there a tillage field. On this occasion luck was with us, however, for while we were negotiating a stone wall, the covey—a fine one of a dozen or more birds, which in some miraculous way had succeeded in eluding poachers—got up out of an adjoining field of stubble. There were no high hedges to obscure the view, and it was possible to mark where they went down again in a late potato crop at the foot of the valley, with poppies and corn marigolds running riot among the withered stalks. Here there was good cover and they were sure to lie well. I suspected that the setter might run in and put the birds up out of range; I knew that my cocker would, if he got the chance. So, leaving both dogs with Murphy, I made for the covey alone. No sooner had I got over the fence into the field than most of the birds rose, affording me an easy right-and-left. The remainder of the covey ran along the drills and rose out of range at the bottom of the field. Unfortunately, high hedges made it quite impossible to mark where they went, and, after searching the country pretty thoroughly with the setter, we had to give them up. With the season so advanced, the birds were wild and strong on the wing, and had probably flown some distance.

As we were returning across the hill, a grouse rose chortling from the heather, a hundred yards or more away. The spaniel started a hare and the temptation

proved too great for the setter. Completely disregarding his owner's bellows, he joined in the chase and disappeared down the hill in full cry. My dog could not stay the pace and returned for chastisement, but we never saw the setter again. It was hardly a case of "though lost to sight, to memory dear," for, long after, Murphy kept telling me the dreadful things he would do when he caught the dog again.

From time to time the distant note of golden plover drifted down on the wind, and on reaching the hilltop I saw a big flock of these birds wheeling low over a bare patch of rocky ground. Rising high in the air, they would disappear behind the hill, only to return to the same spot again, eventually pitching where it was impossible to stalk them. On such occasions a shot can sometimes be obtained by walking boldly straight up to the plover, and I tried this method. The birds rose together just out of range and, contrary to their usual habits, flew right away. A few might have been obtained by firing into the brown, but so close packed were they that I did not like to take the risk of wounding many. Later, a single bird, more curious than the others, came over my head at a tremendous pace, and, more by luck than good management, I succeeded in getting it.

A big flat rock seemed a good place for lunch, especially as, while sitting on it, I could look over one of my favourite bits of snipe country—a lonely stretch of bog-

land cradled in the hills, with a rushy pond or two where there were often a few duck or a bunch of teal. In spite of its small area this bog could generally be relied on to add two or three couple of snipe to the bag. Towards the end of October it was often full of snipe, for wisps of migratory birds invariably dropped into it on arrival in the neighbourhood, finding its peace and solitude much to their liking after their long journey. During all my previous visits I had never known it to be disturbed by anyone except myself, but to-day was to prove the exception. I was just meditating over a pipe whether I should try to stalk one of the ponds on the chance of any duck being at home, or start on the snipe, when, suddenly, three men came running down the hill heading straight for the best part of the bog. This was unbearable, and, recognizing the nearest one, I yelled at him to stop. Ordinarily a quiet sort of man, now he seemed as one bereft; I might as well have tried to stop a charging rhinoceros. Soon they had floundered across the middle of the bog, sending snipe screeching in all directions, and the mad race was continued until they disappeared over the shoulder of a far hill.

Murphy was well-nigh speechless with surprise and indignation: "Be the tare, if that don't beat all I ever see; may the divil scald them!" he exclaimed at last, quite at a loss to explain the extraordinary proceeding. Later on we came across an old man cutting furze, who enlightened us.

Apparently the widow Carthy, who lived "over beyant the bog," had killed a pig that morning, and the good news had just penetrated to her neighbours, some of whom had rival claims to certain internal organs of the animal. Obviously one pig could not supply enough delicacies to go round, hence the marathon across the bog, to the ruin of my snipe-shooting.

On the way back, I picked up another snipe and a woodcock; the latter afforded an easy shot out of the heather, but was not in good condition, as it had probably only just come in.

It was not until the sun had crept behind the distant mountains and the golden lights changed to crimson that I reached the farmhouse. The door was open, and on the kitchen hearth a large log fire blazed up the open chimney, throwing the low-raftered room into light and shadow. Seen by the aid of the fitful flames, the dresser, with its cheerful crockery, the winter's bacon hanging from the ceiling, and the chimney corner where Murphy smoked and dozed away the winter evenings, all gave an impression of comfort and of home. A small bare-legged child, a sheep-dog, and a cat were unceremoniously ousted from the fireside by Mrs Murphy, who came forward to welcome me with true Irish hospitality. Her manners were so simple, so natural, and yet so dignified that she soon made me feel at home. A three-legged pot hung suspended over the fire, and from it there emerged the most delicious scones. The teapot

was warming on the embers, and after the long day in the open it was all very welcome.

Full justice was done to the meal, and afterwards, while enjoying a comfortable pipe seated in front of the blazing logs, I persuaded Tim Murphy to tell me about his famous visit to Heaven. I wish I could tell the story in his own words, but, failing that, the best I can do is to give my friend Julia Kelly's version of it.

One day Tim went to the fair at the neighbouring village of Mullinavourney to sell a pig and, in that pleasant condition known as "having a drop taken," he started an angry dispute with a dealer over the price of the pig in front of Julia Kelly's public-house.

"I will give you two-pound-ten for the pig, and divil a penny more," said the dealer, whose patience had become exhausted.

"Arrah, take yerself and yer money home out of this," replied Tim. "Is it after insulting the pig you would be, and she reared like one of our own childer?"

The dealer took advantage of this opening to make some disparaging and quite unprintable remarks about the Murphy family in general, and, skilfully avoiding a terrific blow aimed at his head, brought his own ash-plant down with a resounding thwack on poor Tim's skull.

When Tim recovered consciousness he found himself stretched on the horse-hair sofa in Julia Kelly's back

parlour, gazing at a stuffed fox in the corner. The fair Julia herself was beside him with a stiff glass of whisky.

The first thing he did was to drink the whisky, then, turning to Julia, he said : “ ’Tis a quare dream I’m after having entoirely. I dreamt I went to Heaven.”

“Did you, now, Timmy?” replied Julia, with great interest.

“Yes, and the gates were locked agin me. After knocking a long time, who should come out but the blessed Saint Peter himself, with a big bunch of keys in his hand, and unlocked the gate.

“ ‘What is your name?’ sez the Saint to me.

“ ‘Tim Murphy,’ sez I.

“ ‘Where do you come from?’

“ ‘Mullinavourney,’ I tould him.

“At that Saint Peter went to the lodge beside the gates and brought out a big book and his spectacles.

“ ‘Wait now,’ sez he, wetting his thumb and turning over the pages. ‘Wait now, the whiles I look up that place in the book. Mullenaranky, Mullinabeg, Mullinaboy, Mullinahone, Mullinavat, Mullinavourney.

“ ‘Ah, here it is now, but ’tis bad news I have for yez. Niver a soul from Mullinavourney ever entered Heaven.’

“With that I started to argue with him, and tould him that if he would let me in I would give up the drink, and take the pledge from Father Downey. Divil

a word would he listen to, but slams the gates in me face."

At this abrupt termination to the adventure disappointment must have showed in Julia's face.

"Could you see at all what Heaven was loike, Timmy?" she asked.

"I could then, I could see quite well through the gates while we were argifying on the road."

"And what was it loike then?" repeated Julia.

"Shure now, it was just loike any other big gintleman's place."

And that was all the description of Heaven Julia could get out of Tim Murphy, nor did I on this occasion meet with any more success. After all, from his point of view it seemed quite adequate.

Having finished my pipe, and as darkness was coming on apace, I reluctantly tore myself away from the fireside to face the long road home.

The bag was counted and put in the trap—one brace of partridges, one couple snipe, one golden plover, and a woodcock—nothing very wonderful, certainly, but I have often had a bigger one and enjoyed the day less.

Murphy had quite forgotten the episode of the setter. Probably the dog, knowing his master, had crept home long ago, taken pot-luck in the pig bucket, and gone to sleep comfortably in the hay-loft; but the unfortunate business of the pheasant still rankled, and I had to promise to come and try the gorse cover again.

Once more mists were enveloping the hills as I took leave of my friends. Leading my pony down the stony lane, I felt that Ireland is still a delightful country to live in, in spite of the queer things that happen in it—or is it, perhaps, because of them?

CHAPTER SIX

IRISH SETTERS, POINTERS AND IRISH WATER-SPANIELS

ROUGH shooting in the Irish Free State generally means tramping over many miles of country with very little game in it, and without good dogs blank days will often be the sportsman's lot.

He may, for example, hear of a covey of partridges on a farm, which consists of a few acres of tillage and many acres of coarse, grassy fields, gorse, heather and boggy land. Unless he is lucky enough to find the birds on the stubble or in the roots the search will be well-nigh hopeless without setters or pointers. Without such companions, too, it will be impossible to find a pack of grouse on a big stretch of moorland, and he will have to trudge through all the little marshy fields that do not hold snipe in order to find the few that do. Besides, to watch dogs working is half the pleasure of this kind of shooting.

Whether setters or pointers are to be preferred is a matter of opinion, and largely depends on the type of country for which the dogs are required.

I am no expert on the points which these breeds should possess in order to win prizes on the show bench. There are many excellent books on the subject, but, in my humble opinion, no sporting dog should be allowed

to win a prize at a show unless it has previously proved its capabilities in the field. The practice of breeding dogs like Irish setters solely with a view to showing has a deplorable effect on the breed. Of course, although a gun-dog may win any amount of prizes on the show bench, it cannot obtain the coveted title of "Champion" unless a certificate of working merit is obtained at a field trial; but some people are not aware of this. A neighbour of mine, for example, recently purchased, at a high figure, an Irish setter which had won prizes at shows up and down the country, but which turned out to be—as an old lady once described her gardener—not only a fool but a "nasty fool" into the bargain. He would sit up for tit-bits at meals, but on the first shot being fired would run home with his tail between his legs. He was a beautiful dog to look at, bred down to the fine points of a race-horse and with a head like a Borzoi; but I would rather see a sturdy dog, with a broad forehead, where there is plenty of room for brains, and a sensible nose with wide nostrils, capable of winding all the game scent that there is about.

One knows that a few mysterious gentlemen sitting in secret conclave in Paris decide the fashions for the whole of the feminine world, but who are the people that decide them in the dog world? All I know is that they have altered two good old breeds—fox-terriers and Irish terriers—almost beyond recognition. The heads of these dogs are now designed to resemble the bonnet of

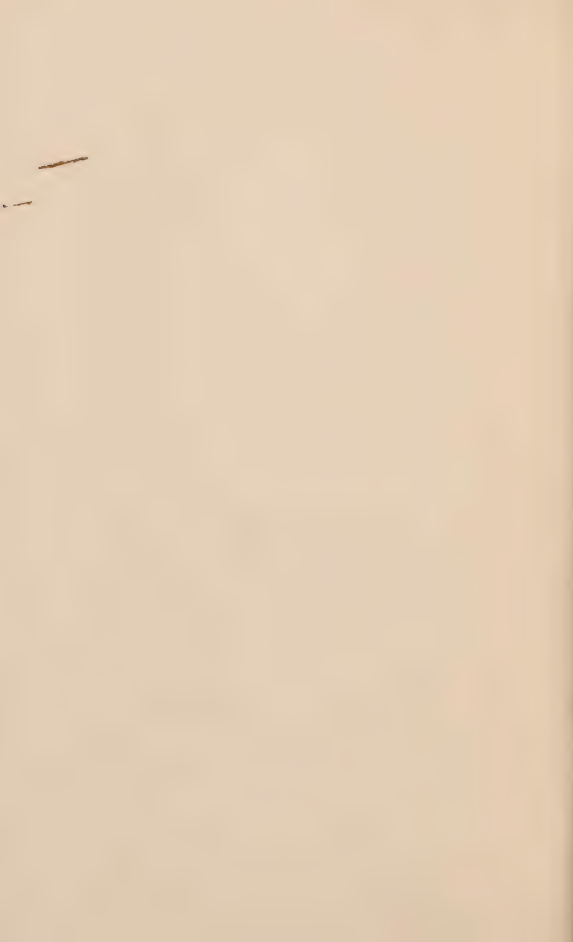
an eight-cylinder car more than anything else. But this is in the nature of a digression, and, worse still, airing what is perhaps, after all, only a personal grievance—which is always a very boring thing to do. To return to Irish setters and pointers. I have had a good deal of experience shooting over these dogs in different parts of the world, and perhaps a brief description of their qualities in the field may be of help in deciding which breed to choose.

The origin of Irish setters is rather obscure, but, to judge by their typically Hibernian appearance and temperament, the breed must have been evolved many years ago among the mountains and bogs of Kerry. At any rate, a pure Irish setter is now a very handsome and clean-bred-looking dog, with its rich chestnut coat, graceful but powerful build, well-feathered legs, and handsome, fan-like tail.

Some years ago the red-and-white Irish setter was quite common in Ireland, and there are still a few of these dogs in the country. When the Irish Red Setter Club was formed, however, it determined that the dog it fostered must be all red, and the red-and-white animal became unfashionable in consequence. This is rather a pity in a way, for, although there can be no question that all red is the handsomer colour, the white markings were an advantage in enabling a dog to be seen easily on a mountain. Indeed, a red setter working in tall heather is so difficult to see that it sometimes



THE AUTHOR'S IRISH SETTER



becomes necessary to tie a white handkerchief round its neck.

The principal virtues of the Irish setter are keenness, endurance, wide range, speed, and capacity for standing cold and wet. Its faults are shared with other members of the setter family, but intensified by an Irish temperament. It is inclined to be wild, wilful, headstrong and excitable. It lacks steadiness and, unless regularly worked and subject to strict discipline, is often "agin the government" and a curse out shooting. It cannot work well on a hot day without plenty of water, but this is seldom a difficulty in Ireland. It is more difficult to train than a pointer, and is apt to forget lessons unless a few weeks' "refresher course" is given at the beginning of each shooting season.

Perhaps I have given too much prominence to the faults of the breed, but I have seen many a day spoilt by wild Irish setters chasing a hare across bogs, running in and putting up the only covey of partridges for miles around, or racing madly down a mountain-side in a hopeless endeavour to extract the tail feathers from a young grouse. It is therefore only fair to place to the credit side of the account that a really well-trained Irish setter is, without doubt, the best dog for most kinds of rough shooting in Ireland. Irish setters, too, have recently done very well at field trials in competition with other varieties of the setter family.

Pointers were first introduced into this country about

1720. They were then known as Spanish pointers and were of thicker and clumsier build than the present-day dog. White, with liver, lemon or black markings, is the usual colour.

In our grandfathers' day they were a very popular breed, owing to their close ranging and steadiness; also, owing to their conspicuousness and the upright position when pointing, in contrast to the crouching "set" adopted by setters at that time, pointers could readily be seen in cover. For rough shooting over enclosed country, where in a day's walk you may expect to find a covey or two of partridges, a stray pheasant, snipe, and occasional woodcock, there is no better companion. They are steady, reliable, and as keen as mustard; but even the modern pointers are not so fast as setters, nor have they the wide range, and on grouse moors, owing to the rough stems of young heather, they are more liable to be crippled by sore feet. This can be remedied by soaking in strong brine, but it often causes pointers to be laid up just when they are wanted.

Some authorities maintain that pointers have better noses than setters, but I think this is often because setters work so much faster, and, in consequence, sometimes overrun a scent.

Because of their thin coats, pointers suffer greatly from cold, and in winter are miserable when working over very wet country where setters are in their element. My experience with well-bred pointers is that they are



" ON THE TRAIL OF A COCK PHEASANT "

rather delicate dogs, and require a deal of care, good food, and warm, dry kennels.

Pointers like those which are shown in the illustration on the trail of a cock-pheasant are sturdy, and a trifle clumsy to look at, with more than the proper allowance of hound in the breeding. They would probably not win a prize on the show bench, but on the other hand their owner tells me that he has shot over these dogs regularly for three winters without their being knocked up for a single day.

One great thing in the pointer's favour is that it is an easy dog to train, and seldom forgets its lessons, even if only shot over occasionally. It is, first and last, a sporting dog, and never degenerates into a mere pet.

To sum up, pointers are probably preferable for enclosed country where partridges and other game are fairly plentiful, and where close ranging and steadiness are essential; also, for anyone who cannot shoot regularly throughout the season. But for a hard winter's shooting over Irish bogs and moors, entailing severe work and wide ranging, an Irish setter should always be chosen.

A cross between a pointer and setter, commonly called a "dropper," often makes a very good dog, with the good qualities of both parents. Many people, however, will have nothing to do with a mongrel, although it is sometimes the most intelligent of the lot.

One of the best dogs I ever saw for shooting was a cross between a pedigree Labrador bitch and a sheep-dog—the result of one of those accidents which sometimes happen even in the best families.

For snipe-shooting over very wet bogs, where snipe are usually wild and get up in wisps, I think, on the whole, one is better without either setter or pointer, however well trained they may be. You know that the snipe are there, and the extra noise the dog makes only increases their wildness, though in justice to the Irish setter it must be said that it moves through the bog with the stealthy tread of a panther, making as little noise as possible. It is when you have put the snipe out of a bog, or in mild weather when the birds are spread all over the country and in small outlying marshes, that these dogs are so useful.

I once trained a pointer myself, and the task proved an easy and pleasant one. She was given the somewhat unusual name for a shooting dog of "Rose," as, owing to her incurable habit of rolling on dead crows, etc., she would "smell as sweet by any other name." I never trained a dog before, but she had all the instincts of a good pointer from the start and was never wild. She was brimful of intelligence, a willing worker and as steady as a rock on point. One day I arrived home without her and, remembering in an absent-minded sort of way that I had sent her to search a field which seldom held anything, I retraced my steps,

to find the poor dog pointing a snipe. She must have been there at least half-an-hour. When she saw me she just turned her head slightly for a second, and I caught the look of joyful relief in her eyes. Fortunately I shot the snipe, which was the best apology I could make.

I found that teaching the dog to beat a big field thoroughly was one of the most difficult parts of training. At first, I taught her to stop and look in my direction whenever I blew a whistle, and then to work according to my signals. Very soon she would search a field by herself, making wide spiral sweeps without any directions, while I awaited the result.

One of the worst faults in ranging is pottering round the hedges, and this habit is quickly acquired by any dog which is allowed to hunt rabbits. On a rough shoot rabbits are the greatest curse to anyone who has setters or pointers, and once these dogs get into the way of hunting it is next to impossible to cure them. I had to get rid of a splendid Irish setter as, during my absence from home, he spent the whole time after rabbits and was quite useless for shooting in consequence.

In training dogs, patience and gentleness are essential to success, but such faults as running in and putting up game, breaking fence, or chasing fur, should be severely punished if persisted in. When not at work, dogs should always be taught to keep to heel. The habit of pointing or setting larks and other small birds,

so prevalent in Ireland, and other countries where there is a great difficulty in training dogs owing to the scarcity of game, is a very annoying one, but should not be punished as a fault. Larks must have a slight gamey scent, but when there is game about dogs will not bother about them.

Few dog-breakers will teach setters or pointers to retrieve, and in this they are probably right, for their proper work is not improved thereby. In their anxiety to retrieve they are apt to run in, especially when they see a bird drop. Still, a well-trained Irish setter able to retrieve is a very valuable companion when you are limited to one dog.

The example of a steady dog, with a sure nose, is invaluable in training, and, of course, a necessity for teaching "backing." It is very interesting to watch a brace of good dogs which are regularly shot over and, in consequence, have become thoroughly accustomed to each other's ways. They divide the country between them, leaving no part unsearched, and, whichever dog finds first, the other "backs" at once with an entire absence of jealousy. A close bond of sympathy and understanding grows up between them, and they become deeply attached to each other.

A curious instance of this was told to me recently. Two friends, living about seven miles apart, shot together for three or four seasons. One owned a pointer and the other an Irish setter. Through sharing the joys and

disappointments of many a long day together, these dogs became the greatest pals. One evening the owner of the pointer was surprised to see the setter turning up at his house—a thing it had never done before except when brought over by its master for shooting. The dog would not come into the house, but seemed very distressed, whining continually and running up and down the drive. Eventually he went out to see what was the matter, whereupon the setter led him to where the pointer lay dead just near the house. During the lambing season some Irish farmers have a horrid habit of laying down poison indiscriminately on their lands without warning, and evidently the poor dog had got hold of some of it.

The setter refused to be comforted or to touch any food. Apparently, it had started out as usual that day to accompany its master to the office, who, later on, noticed that the dog had disappeared. Although the setter had never left him in this way before he was not anxious, thinking it had returned home. Some strange instinct must have impelled the animal to go across seven miles of country to its dying friend. Dogs are queer, uncanny creatures at times, and their ways are past human understanding.

Many instances are on record of pointers and setters refusing to work, and even returning home, when the shooting is bad and all their efforts wasted. A friend of mine, who was an excellent snipe-shot, had a Gordon

setter appropriately named, "Rebel." On the rare days when he was shooting badly this dog would remain at heel and refuse duty, but on a snipe being shot he would prance round with delight and work perfectly again. My friend often took Rebel by train to a place some stations up the line, where there was good snipe-shooting. One day he lent the dog to a man who was a very bad shot, and who started the day by missing seven snipe running, in a bog near the railway station. Rebel became more and more fed-up, and in the end made off back to the station with his tail between his legs. He waited there patiently for a train going in the right direction and then jumped into the guard's van. Luckily the guard was an old friend, and left him alone to see what he would do. Rebel lay down quietly in the van until the train arrived at his station, when he jumped out and ran home.

Fortunately my dogs have never been blessed—or rather cursed—with such critical faculties, or I should seldom have the pleasure of their company during my rambles with a gun.

About fifty years ago the Irish water-spaniel, with its intelligent, shaggy head and topknot, compact cobby body, covered with close crisp curls, smooth, rat-like tail and curious rich puce colour, used to be a common enough object in Southern Ireland, but now these dogs have become rather rare there. This is a great pity, for there is no better companion for wild-fowling than a



IRISH WATER SPANIEL—CHAMPION BREIFNY DEVORGILLA



Country Life, Ltd.

"STEADY AS A ROCK"

dog of this breed, which was brought to a great state of perfection nearly a century ago by Justin McCarthy. Indeed, probably most of the best specimens of the present day trace their descent back to his famous kennel.

They make excellent retrievers, for, even on the coldest day, they are happier in the water than out of it, and no dog is more persevering after a wounded duck in reeds. They are hardy and intelligent, and their keenness and pluck are beyond all praise.

I once shot a duck which fell into the middle of a river in heavy flood. Before I could stop her my Irish water-spaniel, Shiela, plunged in after the bird, which she just managed to reach. The current was very powerful and the dog was swept nearly a hundred yards down-stream over a weir. For a few dreadful moments I could see no sign of her, and was beginning to fear the worst, when she suddenly appeared, a few yards from the bank, still carrying the duck. She was very exhausted, but I forced some whisky down her throat and gave her a good rubbing-down, and before long her only anxiety was to resume work again.

The scenting powers of Irish water-spaniels seem to be very highly developed, and when I had Shiela I seldom lost a bird. She was equally useful out fishing, for whenever I cracked off a salmon fly, and made her search round the spot, she always found it again, but

how any scent can adhere to a fly which had perhaps been in the water an hour or more is difficult to understand. The only drawback was that in her desire to help she could only with difficulty be restrained from jumping in to retrieve a salmon when it was being played.

If any fault can be found with Irish water-spaniels it is that, like Irish setters, their excessive keenness sometimes makes them a little wild and excitable. They become at times a bit restive if kept to heel for long periods, which, of course, is often necessary when duck-shooting. But with dogs of such an affectionate and intelligent nature a little patience and regular work is all that is required. Indeed, the more an Irish water-spaniel is made its owner's personal companion, the better it will work for him, and no amount of petting can change this dog's character as an out-and-out sportsman.

Mr Trench O'Rorke, Breifny House, Bodmin, Cornwall, to whom I am indebted for the excellent photograph of an Irish water-spaniel, is Honorary Secretary of the Irish Water Spaniel Association, and is making a praiseworthy effort to resuscitate the breed. No one could be better qualified for the work, for he has kept and bred these dogs for nearly fifty years, and is equally successful with them at shows and at field trials.

For rough shooting in the Irish Free State, where

snipe, woodcock and wild-fowl are the *pièces de résistance*, one could not make a better selection than a brace of Irish setters and an Irish water-spaniel. Where there is much cover to beat, a cocker-spaniel makes a useful addition. Your kennels would then—to cull a phrase from Tottenham Court Road—be “ choicely and adequately furnished ” for the winter season.

CHAPTER SEVEN

A CHAPTER ON HUNTING

THE history of fox-hunting in Ireland is a very old one. Lord Castlehaven, in his account of the Irish wars in the reign of Charles I., mentions hunting several times, and relates that, being in Kilkenny, just after the Peace of 1648, he went "early one morning a-fox-hunting as I was accustomed all the winter." This would show that fox-hunting was a recognized winter sport in the first half of the seventeenth century. Since that period it has probably never been discontinued, although, until towards the latter part of the eighteenth century, it was carried on by private packs. The first Hunt club was established in Ireland in 1797, by Mr John Power, in Kilkenny, and the Duhallow Hunt followed soon after. The Meath Hunt Club came into being in 1813 and the Kildare about 1810.

Probably in Ireland, just as in England, the palmy days of hunting passed with the Victorian age, but in Ireland we are still spared, to a great extent, the curse of tarred roads, crowded fields, and a mob of motor-cars following the hunt—nearly as bad as the traffic in the Strand. In Ireland, too, foxes are plentiful in most districts, wire has not yet become a serious menace,

and fortunately, with the exception of an outbreak near Wexford in February 1928, we have been free from foot-and-mouth disease for some time. In any case, in a country with a comparatively scanty population, there is not the same risk of this dread disease spreading.

Glancing back over the past, one is reminded of many noted sportsmen who made hunting history in Ireland in those days. Sam Reynall, who made Meath, is a name to swear by in that county. Whyte-Melville, in his *Riding Recollections*, says of him that he found Meath without a gorse covert and drew between thirty and forty sure finds in it before he died. He hunted the Meaths for twenty years, and was justly proud of his pack. On one occasion, after an hour's steady hunting, he was heard to exclaim: "And why shouldn't they be good? Sure, I bred them myself!"

When the Empress of Austria hunted in Meath there was in command Jock Trotter, perhaps the most famous sportsman of his day, who, although "a sportsman of the hardy breed that comes from t'other side of the Tweed"—as "Triviata" described him in *The Field*, was surely the hardest rider to hounds, on any kind of horse, that ever crossed the strongly fenced broad plains of Meath. John Watson, who might be called the father of polo, was Master for fourteen years, and under him there was no better pack in the world than the Royal Meaths, and their fame drew sportsmen from all parts

of the world. He was no respecter of persons, and even the newly appointed Viceroy of Ireland came under the cloud of his displeasure for heading a fox. On its being pointed out to him that it was no less a person than the Lord-Lieutenant he replied: "I don't care if it is the Lord Almighty, he isn't going to head my fox." John Watson learned all he knew about hounds and hunting from his celebrated father, Robert Watson, who for forty-five years was Master of the Carlow Hounds, hunting them himself for most of the time—surely a wonderful record.

Robert Watson also had little regard for polite conventions when in the hunting field. During one great hunt, hounds were running fast down to a bad-looking fence, the only jumpable place being in a corner. Two men in black coats were just in front of the Master, and on reaching the spot both their horses refused and nearly jostled him. Turning in his saddle, he called out: "What are you doing here, sir?" At the same time, delivering a sound right-and-left with his whip, he jumped the fence and was soon with his hounds again. Later on in the day a friend pointed out to him that he had treated the two men in rather an unceremonious way, only to be assured that he had absolutely no recollection of the incident. Mr Watson resembled the Captain of *H.M.S. Pinafore*:

"Bad language and abuse
I never, never use"

but he was a stern disciplinarian in the field, and his remarks were often very much to the point. His friend and neighbour in Kilkenny, Sir John Power, of Kilfane, also showed consistently good sport over a long period, and was a great authority on hounds and their management.

Any notice of the Tipperary Hounds would be incomplete without mentioning Richard Burke, who was Master of the "Gallant Tips" from 1887 to 1909. In his hey-day he was known as one of the most dauntless riders to hounds in Ireland, and still—though, alas, on the wrong side of seventy—enjoys many a day with the Queen's County Pack. Such is his love of hunting that, when living in California, he established and hunted his own pack of hounds there.

While on the subject of Tipperary one is reminded of a moonlight hunt that took place there on 5th January 1845, when the Third Marquis of Waterford was owner of the hounds. A field of sixty met at Bansha: they found a short running fox, which quickly went to ground, and was as promptly dug out. By this time the moon was rising, so, putting the fox in a sack, they brought him to Bookers Cahirhill, where they liberated him, and for five miles they ran him over some of the stiffest country in Tipperary. The field had to follow by the light of the moon and, when that failed, by the help of the "music" alone. They eventually ran into the fox while jumping a high wall at eleven-twenty P.M.

Needless to say, falls were numerous, and Johnny Ryan, the huntsman, thought he got off well with only four.

This Marquis of Waterford afterwards purchased the Waterford Hunt hounds and formed them into a private pack. On his death they became known to fame as the Curraghmore Hunt.

The name of Burton Persse, who was Master for so many years, is inseparably connected with that famous pack, "The Galway Blazers." People so often ask how these hounds got such a curious nickname that perhaps one may be forgiven for telling the story again. In the days now past, when Irish "wit and divilment" were at their zenith, and hard drinking and hard riding were supreme, the Galway hounds held a festive gathering at Birr, in the King's County. The occasion was a hunt when many of the local gentry and sporting farmers joined in the chase. After a good day's sport, and a glorious and exhilarating evening, matters were further enlivened by setting fire to the inn, which was, unfortunately, burned to the ground. The Galway hounds were ever afterwards known as "The Blazers." Those "bad old days," or "good old times," whichever you like to call them, are gone for ever, and we are now almost as well-behaved as our friends across the Channel.

One of the attractions of hunting in Ireland is the diversity of the country over which you ride. In the glorious grass countries of Meath and Kildare,

or Limerick, given the necessary scent, hounds run as hard as the heart of man can desire. A fast, bold-jumping horse, with a bit of blood in him, is needed if one is to be in at the death.

The typical Meath fence—and a stopper it is—is the famed double ditch. The country being flat, ditches are made surprisingly deep and wide. The earth dug out forms a bank, in most cases tall and broad, with a correspondingly deep ditch on the other side. Often have I seen the look of amazement which spreads over the face of an English visitor hunting in Meath for the first time, who, after negotiating the big gripe on the near side, gets safely to the top of the high bank only to find a gripe as big, or bigger, still to be faced on the far side. Pitiably, too, is the plight of the man on a timid horse, which, frightened by the depth of the far gripe, tries to turn round on the bank. A strong hand and resolute riding is then necessary to avert disaster.

Another common Meath fence is the “narrow back.” This consists of a high bank, very often narrow on the top, with a wide gripe either on the landing or taking-off side. It is one of the most pleasurable sensations in the world to be on the back of a good “narrow-back” jumper that kicks off the bank properly with his hind-feet, and lands with plenty to spare.

In the north of Meath stone walls are fairly frequent ;

the fences are not so big, and the country generally is more open.

Gorse coverts, usually specially planted for the purpose, are the principal fox strongholds in Meath. As a rule they are a good distance apart, so that if a fox goes away a hunt is assured, provided that the all-important factor of proper earth-stopping has been attended to.

The best centre for hunting in Meath is Navan, where there is a good hotel. Meath can also be hunted quite well from Dublin, which, indeed, is the best hunting centre in the whole of Ireland. From Dublin you have the choice of hunting with the following packs, all within quite a reasonable radius: the Meaths, Ward Union Staghounds, Kildare, Bray Harriers, Hillside Harriers, and several others. The sportsman would be hard to please who could not satisfy his love of the chase with one or other of these packs. He would have no difficulty in hunting six days a week, should he so desire.

There is ample stabling for horses at Dunshaughlin, Drumree, and various other places, where good stables have been built especially for hunters, and in pre-War days these used to be booked far in advance.

Some years ago American visitors used to come over regularly to hunt in Ireland, especially in Meath, and during the past few seasons there has been a welcome return to this custom.



Photo : Poole, Waterford

A FINE TYPE OF HEAVY-WEIGHT IRISH HUNTER

Bective Lodge — John Watson's old home, in the centre of the Meath country and conveniently situated for neighbouring packs — has now been rented as a headquarters by some keen American sportsmen and sportswomen, and it is intended to run it on the lines of a country club in the States.

If only conditions and the sport obtainable over here were more fully appreciated among American hunting people, there is little doubt that many more would follow this example.

Variety is the spice of life, and riding to hounds in Ireland is a great contrast to the sport enjoyed with hunt clubs in America, although no one who has had any experience of the latter will deny that it calls forth the best from horse and rider.

Kildare is practically a replica of Meath. The fences are much the same, but there is more marshy land and bogland in parts of it.

Hunting in Kildare one day, a well-known hard-riding lady was negotiating a broad gripe which had a small ash-tree growing out over it from the bank on the far side. On landing, her horse lost his hind-legs, whereupon the lady, with great presence of mind, seized hold of a branch of the tree. As her horse slipped back into the depths she scrambled into the tree, and was literally left "up a tree," to the great amusement of the field. There she was seated in the tree overhanging the deep ditch in which her horse wallowed, and it was a difficult

job to get her to terra firma once more. She did not hear the end of it for some time.

Galway is the land *par excellence* of stone walls, many of them four feet or over, which are inclined to give one palpitations when riding at them. They are, however, for the most part, built with small round stones towards the top; if a horse hits the wall these give way, so they are not as dangerous as they look. Also, if one is not in the first flight the walls are considerably reduced in height by the time one arrives. The great charm of a stone-wall country, to my mind, is that it is possible to jump anywhere, and there is no necessity for the "follow-my-leader" system that often has to be adopted where there is only one jumpable place in a fence.

It is a fine sight to see a hard-riding Irish field charging down in line at a wall, and a glad sound to hear the top stones rattling to the ground, dislodged by the horses kicking back at them as they clear the wall—a favourite trick of many old stone-wall hunters. Another great advantage is the almost uninterrupted view one gets of the hounds, racing ahead or streaming over the next wall like an avalanche, in the wake of a stout-hearted wild fox. Half the pleasure of fox-hunting is done away with if you cannot see the hounds working.

Limerick is classed by some of the best judges as the finest country possible to hunt over. Broad galloping

fields, bounded by high banks and walls, are the characteristic features. The hounds, when Nigel Baring was Master, were known as one of the best packs in the world. They still live up to their reputation, and during the present season have attracted a large number of strangers. Indeed, I believe that there is not a vacant room in the Adare Hotel, which is situated in the centre of the hunting district.

The Duhallow Hunt, with kennels at Mallow, in Co. Cork, also possesses a really good country to ride over, although in parts the going is on the heavy side. It is essentially a bank country, very open, and therefore easy to see hounds work in. Not many of the banks have ditches alongside them, and it has always been a mystery to me where the earth to make the banks came from originally. They are, however, for the most part, big and safe, and the sport provided by the popular Master, Mr J. S. Sheppard, who hunts hounds himself, is second to none.

Another noted Cork pack is the United Hunt, whose territory borders on Duhallow. The character of the country in general is much the same, but in places it is rougher.

Tipperary is a fine hunting country, almost entirely grass. The going is excellent—large galloping fields with big, safe banks and ditches. You want a horse with a turn of speed and good quarters and shoulders to live with the "Gallant Tips" when they make up

their mind to go. The country ridden over when the meet is at Ballingarry, for example, is not to be beaten by any in Ireland. These hounds, under the Mastership of Mr W. Filmer Sankey, the well-known gentleman rider, showed fine sport and had many good runs in the 1926-1927 season. Clonmel is a convenient place to hunt from, as there is accommodation in the town, and houses are usually to be let in the neighbourhood, which is a very pleasant one.

The sport to be obtained in Kilkenny with the County Pack, under Major Dermont McCalmont, is as good as anyone could wish. He has got together a splendid pack of hounds, bred from the best blood in England, which he hunts himself. The country has an immense variety of fences. The fields are small, so that the amount of jumping you do in a day is astonishing. Every sort of fence, stone wall, bank, gripe and double ditch is to be met with in the course of the hunt. Part of South Kilkenny is rough hilly country, where the wild hill-foxes are found. It makes the blood course in the veins to hear the melodious music of the hounds echoing along the valley as you gallop down the hillside to the grassy plains below. In all this country there is nothing to stop the man who is mounted on a clever horse. The fences are principally stone walls and lovely medium-sized banks, which can be jumped anywhere, and the absence of woods and hedges gives an uninterrupted view of the flying pack.



"NIGHTSHIRT"
The property of Lady Helen McCalmont

Much of the country hunted over by the West Meath hounds is equal to the best of Meath, although in the north end there is a fair amount of bogland. Part of it, too, is stone-wall country, which will test the powers of the best stone-wall jumper ever bred.

West Meath sportsmen are noted for their hospitality, and a visitor coming to hunt with them may be certain of a warm welcome. But, indeed, the same may be said about the members of any other hunt in Ireland.

County clubs are kindly disposed to the stranger within their gates, especially if he be a hunting man. Around many of the Irish hunting centres there are houses with good stabling to let—indeed, where old houses are concerned, the stables are often the more commodious of the two. Some of the provincial hotels are quite comfortable, have good stabling, and make very convenient headquarters.

Many of us can remember the time when hunting in Ireland, especially with the lesser known packs, could be enjoyed for next to nothing. Alas! these pleasant days are gone for ever, but it is still considerably cheaper than in England. The Hunt subscriptions, for one thing, even for the fashionable packs, are much lower, ranging from £15 per horse to £6, 6s. with some of the lesser known but equally sporting packs.

Masters of hounds in Ireland are now faced with the necessity of keeping up the country, hounds, coverts, etc., with a greatly reduced number of subscribers, and

meeting as well claims for fowl, etc., "destroyed by the fox." This last item is a perpetual curse in Ireland, and a severe strain on both temper and credulity. The following letter, recently received by a much-harassed Hunt Secretary, is a good specimen of what one has to put up with :

"HONORED SIR,—That ould divil of a fox that do be yapping every night above in Coolagh Wood has me broke entoirely. He came down wan night and kilt 16 turkeys, 11 hins, and a young ass on me.

"Please send the money quick as I am badly in need of it."

Before the War, fields ruled rather on the large side with the Meaths and Kildares, and in the Dublin end of the country frequently ran to two hundred or more. Nowadays seventy to one hundred would be nearer the mark, and that only at favourite meets. The followers of many of the smaller packs have dwindled to sorry proportions, and all too often the lack of funds is becoming a serious menace. The absence of the large number of British officers formerly stationed in Ireland is a sad blow to Irish hunting, and one can only hope that it will attract sufficient visitors to make up for this loss.

One has often heard that the country in Ireland is a difficult one to ride over, and risk to horse and man in negotiating its fences is proportionately greater than on the other side of the water. I do not think myself

that there is much to choose between English and Irish hunting on the score of risk, especially now that tarred roads are so prevalent in the former country. Though the Meath fences, for instance, sound most formidable obstacles, and do not bear too much looking at, I think that it is really the safest country in the world to ride over. One seldom or never hears of a bad accident, and the only cases I can remember of anyone being killed in the last forty years were those when a loose horse cannoned into a man just as he was landing on to road, and when a lady, somehow or other, got a fall jumping a low bush in a gap. Very hard luck this last case, as the lady in question seldom left the road or a safe bridle-path. Neither of these cases can properly be attributed to the danger of hunting in Meath.

“Triviata,” in his *Hibernia Venatica*, thus describes the ditches of Meath and how they should be jumped :

“ Our ditches are deep
But whenever you leap
Throw your heart and your eye to the next place in front ;
For if horse or if man
The black bottom you scan,
Six to four you go in—or you’ll both ‘ do a shunt.’ ”

Although to nothing like the same extent as in England, Ireland is cursed with an increasing amount of wire. This is bad enough when it is attached to posts and put up for all the world to see, but when, as is often the case,

a single strand is run through a hedge along the butts of the bushes, with a view to strengthening it, it becomes a terror indeed.

A famous M.F.H. in the South of Ireland, who, in common with many Masters of Hounds, was not remarkable for his good temper in the field, in the course of a fast hunt took a fall over an unseen strand of wire like this running through a hedge. As he and his horse touched mother earth, another horseman, following too closely in his tracks, hit the wire as well, and soon horses and men were all floundering together in the muddy ditch on the other side. The last victim was the first to get out of the ditch, and, recognizing on whom he had jumped, thought "discretion the better part of valour"; so, climbing in haste on to his horse, he was off and away before the bewildered master had time to get the mud out of his eyes. A third, and quite innocent, follower of the chase, who had by this time come to grief over the same wire, was engaged in painfully picking himself up, when, to his astonishment, he found himself being violently belaboured by the infuriated M.F.H. After the run the Master, in relating the incident to a friend, who, unknown to him, had been an amused spectator of the whole business, concluded by asking: "And wasn't I dam' well right, too?"

"Cer-cer-certainly," replied this sportsman, who was afflicted with a stammer, "if you h-had only t-taken c-care to h-hit THE RIGHT MAN."

On this question of risk and other aspects of Irish hunting I cannot do better than include these notes sent me, after much persuasion, by my old friend, Major R. B. Seigne, a good man to hounds across any country :

“There is, perhaps, an idea that most Irish countries are difficult to cross, and that some special and indefinite qualities are essential in horse and man to enable one to enjoy Irish hunting.

“This idea is, I am afraid, fostered by a certain leaning to exaggeration on this side. For instance, I was told that a huntsman contemplating a transfer to an Irish pack took occasion to make inquiries from an Irish Hunt Whip as to what the country was like. ‘It’s a terrible country,’ he replied ; ‘there’s more people killed in it than I’d like to tell you about.’ ‘But,’ said the English huntsman, with a certain acumen, ‘I never see any reports of all these deaths in the papers.’ This rather staggered the Whip, but without much hesitation he countered it by saying, ‘No, you wouldn’t ; it’s only people who are killed sudden that you reads about in papers. These has lingering deaths.’ Truly a terrible thought, but the huntsman apparently was not sufficiently convinced, and, during several seasons with an Irish pack, was an undefeated man from the very start, over every kind of Irish country.

“The truth is that the unusual in hunting, as in anything else, is always formidable.

“In certain parts of England the fences are both

safe and easy, but in my limited experience of hunting countries in England, I think that many of them demand quite as much courage and resolution as are required in facing any Irish fence.

“ I well remember, during a few days in the Belvoir country, feeling much more worried about the big stiff hedges with ditch attached than ever I have felt about the worst Irish bank. It seemed to me that there was so much more of what the fisherman calls ‘chuck and chance it’ about these really big fly fences. Once safely on to a bank, a horse has the opportunity of deciding what it is best to do according to what he sees to be at the far side. It is always well to leave it to him, provided you give him no chance of deciding to go back the way he came.

“ Some riders advocate ‘letting in the Latchfords’ when, from the top of a bank, an extra wide ditch is revealed to the more or less horrified gaze of horse and man. I think it is almost universally recognized now that the wearing of sharp spurs, always liable to be used unintentionally in the event of a loss of balance, causes a danger by frightening and upsetting the horse, perhaps at a critical moment. Provided blunt spurs are worn, preferably without rowels of any kind, I am sure it does no harm to touch the horse when you require him to make an extra effort. It shows him what is required, and that the rider, at any rate, has made up his mind to go forward.



Photo : Poole, Waterford

WITH THE LIMERICK HOUNDS NEAR CROOM

“Given a fairly solid bank, it is easier for a horse to jump a wide ditch on the landing side, but I still remain undecided as to whether my leg was being pulled by a man who told me that a certain country was very ‘cross,’ as all the ditches were on the take-off side !

“I believe, myself, that a well-bred horse, well up to the weight he is to carry, is equally necessary for the real enjoyment of hunting in either country. Hounds are very highly bred both as regards speed and quick hunting qualities in Ireland, and I have often seen them cross all kinds of country so fast that only a really high-class horse can keep with them.

“To see hounds go like this is one of the chief pleasures of hunting. But such exceptionally fast hunts are in the nature of an occasion in most countries, and to be out of it through lack of the actual speed necessary in the horse leaves one very dissatisfied with him, no matter how well he may have carried you in many a good hunting run.

“It is also a great pleasure in a hunt of any pace to be carried well within the speed of which the horse is capable and to feel that there is no need to hustle him, or to hesitate to take the line which seems to you best, even though you know that it is not actually the shortest.

“A certain well-known Irish hunting man said that there were three points in a hunter—first, shoulder ; second, shoulder ; and third the same—and that there must be nine inches between the elbow and girths before he would

look at any horse. Judging by the all-round excellence of his stud, I suspect that he did in fact consider many other points, but he certainly always made good shoulders and rein a first essential.

"He had also the advantage of a stud groom who drove all his horses in long reins for miles over the country, making them take all fences as they came, and with young horses continued this for months before putting anyone on their backs. On one occasion he had mounted what is called a 'lad of no consequence' on a rather troublesome horse, and was overheard to shout to him, 'Go on, shove him at it; you can't expect to live for ever.'

"It is true that a horse requires a special training to jump a bank country safely, and it seems to be a fact that most aged hunters trained to fly fences are very difficult to teach the quite different method of changing on fences required in Ireland. They are also very liable to injuries in the process, and it is certainly best to buy an Irish horse for Irish hunting. In addition to his training there is probably an inherited instinct to help him, together with a fair share of trespass in pursuit of food in his younger days.

"I believe that there is more in this rather ordinary saying about the three points in a horse than is at first apparent, and that the germ of truth which underlies it (in common with most generalities) is that it is rarely found that a horse possessing a really good shoulder

and rein is without quality and speed. I know that I have never seen in Ireland more perfect hunters than the horses chosen and trained as I have described.

"Some friends of mine once sent a French governess to a party in an 'ass-car' driven by the stable-boy. Arriving rather late, she excused herself by saying that the donkey could *not* be made to go in spite of every effort by her and the boy. Suspecting that a rather amusing contest must have taken place en route, they asked her what Michael (the boy) had to say about it. 'Ah,' she replied, 'he said that if Our Lord had had this ass he would nevair be arrived in Jerusalem.' Which perhaps serves to illustrate my point that in any country, and at all times, a little bit of quality is of the first importance.

"I am not a literary man in any sense, as my readers will have gathered if they have penetrated thus far into these disjointed notes, but, having been asked to contribute some information which might be of interest to those who have not done any hunting in Ireland, I hope that they will not think that I have dwelt too much on those points of breeding and adequate training which are well known to be desirable.

"My excuse is that I have so often heard a thick-set commonish horse described as 'a real type of Irish hunter,' whereas one glance at him is sufficient to suggest 'coming on with the heavy luggage.'

"No doubt such a horse may do more days per week,

and, in certain cramped countries, will be there in most hunts, but, to my mind, especially for a light weight, there is little pleasure in hunting on a horse without quality in any country, and, if limited to a small price, I would prefer to buy a well-bred horse with some blemish rather than a sound horse of more common type.

“I do not think that there are many points of difference in riding to hounds in England or Ireland, but it is useful to remember that, whereas a gate in England is usually a boon and a blessing, the Irish one is almost invariably a snare and a delusion. Four times out of five it will not open except by the combined efforts of two or more dismounted men, and by the time you have rejoined the hunt you have taken more out of your horse and yourself than by jumping the fence.

“It takes very little out of a horse to jump a bank, and, especially at the start of a hunt, I think that it is best to avoid gates and crowded gaps. I have on several occasions been thrown out of hunts by waiting a few minutes at a ‘convenient’ gap or gate, when on a good horse, with which there was no earthly reason why one should not have jumped the fence.

“Some of the Irish coverts are very small, and it is a great advantage to be close to hounds when they draw, but this was so well recognized in one country, famed for its hard riding field, that it became the practice to line up for a start when the fox broke, without waiting for the Master, and with scant regard even for the hounds.

“At one particular covert the Master succeeded in getting a fairly level start, and galloped through a gate down a large field known to be wired all round. The field thundered on his heels rather doubtful, but thinking that he must have got the wire removed. Some of them, I believe, had even established a slight lead when they reached the end of the field, where the Master got off, stepped over the wire, mounted his second horse, which he had sent to the far side of the fence, and continued the hunt in peace and quiet. He showed a nice sense of humour by never even looking round or referring afterwards to the incident in any way.

“This absence of comment also caused much amusement to his field on another occasion. When drawing a demesne, he dismounted, borrowed the keeper’s gun, shot a woodcock which he had marked down in a brake of briars, and, putting it in his pocket, continued to encourage his hounds as if nothing had happened.

“It is notorious that the average man resents a reflection on his horsemanship more than one upon his virtue, yet I will venture to suggest that many, even amongst those who have had considerable experience in bank-jumping, do not quite realize the great importance of sitting forward and thus avoiding, if possible, all interference with the horse’s mouth.

“As is the case, I think, in all fences taken at a slow pace, there is a difficulty in not being ‘left behind,’ slipping back in the saddle in fact, with its inevitable

result, a pull on the horse's mouth. The most dangerous fall results from the horse not getting well up on his bank, and I have had many myself, and seen others which I know have been caused entirely by a pull at the wrong moment.

"The fact that the double bridle is hardly ever used in Ireland is more or less an admission that it is difficult not to give this pull, and impossible to be sure of always avoiding it. If a mistake is made by the rider with a snaffle it is not so serious, but with the curb it is always dangerous.

"Even a fall may have its amusing side to those who do not take part in it, and, though it happened many years ago, I often smile still when I think over the following incident :

"A certain Sheriff in exercise of his functions had made several seizures on farms in a country over which he hunted. Owing, perhaps, to one of the above-mentioned 'pulls,' the Sheriff was decanted quite close to the scene of one of these outrages. His horse, an excitable beast, galloped down a lane, and, as luck would have it, turned into one of the very farmyards where his late rider had been at work. When approaching the yard to recover his mount, the Sheriff was not altogether surprised to hear a loud altercation, mostly consisting of, 'We will not give him the horse,' 'Give the man the horse,' etc., etc. Meantime, the horse, further excited by the loud voices, continued to prance round

the man who had captured him, and the Sheriff thought it discreet to await a more auspicious moment, and a possible favourable decision before joining the party.

“He was presently rewarded by hearing the quiet voice of an old man advising: ‘Ye can’t keep the horse; give the man the little horse, and with the help of God he’ll break his . . . neck.’

“Quick to perceive that the humour of his evidently having overheard the remark would have its appeal, the Sheriff entered on the heels of this advice, and rode off almost with good will, and certainly amidst smiles which were absent when he had previously made his departure with ‘the goods.’”

One of the lessons to be learned from recent Dublin Horse Shōws is the number of really high-class hunters that are produced in Ireland to-day. Though the 15-16 st. hunter is harder to find than formerly, the horse to carry a man up to fourteen stone is as good as, if not better than, ever. The man who is a good judge of a horse, and does not mind paying a good price, can, without much difficulty, get a mount to suit him at this gigantic horse-fair. Coming, as it does, just before cub-hunting, it offers an excellent opportunity of picking up a good hunter before the season proper begins. To have any chance of success at the Dublin Horse Show means careful training beforehand, so that any horse bought there can be made fit for hunting without much further trouble.

The Horse Show sales at Sewells, in Dublin, also offer an opportunity to anyone who knows a good animal when he sees it, and often good horses can be picked up there at moderate prices.

I should strongly advise the man who can afford the time to take a trip to places like Limerick, Mallow, Mullingar or Kilkenny and have a look round for himself. He would very likely be able to get a horse to suit him at a more moderate price than in Dublin or its surroundings. He would also have a better opportunity of judging the horse and riding it over fences before buying. In all these places there are, of course, professional horse-dealers from whom good hunters may occasionally be bought, but if discreet inquiries are made it is sometimes possible to get a really good horse from the farmer who bred him, and thus keep the dealer's commission on the sale in your own pocket. I am a very great believer in Cork and Limerick horses—especially the former. The Co. Cork farmer takes infinite pains when he goes in for breeding and selling hunters, and is especially careful to see that they have been properly schooled over fences. When hunting with the Duhallow hounds, I have seen farmers schooling young horses across country. While on the way to the next draw, five or six of them will often leave the procession on the road, and, after jumping a few fences, rejoin it again farther on.

This all makes for handiness in a hunter, and the

best horses I ever rode came from these two counties. Good horses are also to be had in Kilkenny, Tipperary and Wexford, in fact, over most of the South of Ireland there are horses to suit every type of rider, but the man who wishes to do his hunting cheaply, and cover some of his expenses by reselling his horses, will require to spend much time and trouble over the all-important matter of their purchase. Nowadays good hunters are not so easy to find as they used to be, but one should be able to pick up a well-schooled animal, up to 13 st. 7 lb., in the neighbourhood of £100. In Meath and Kildare, and the best parts of Limerick and Tipperary, for the medium and heavy-weight rider, a horse about 16 hands, with a bit of blood in him, is a necessity. The fields are big and so are the fences, and if a horse is not fast he cannot go the pace, and without breeding you are soon left. The best type of hunter is usually bred out of the three-quarter-bred mare by a good thoroughbred horse. He must have good shoulders and quarters, be well ribbed up, with good legs and feet. He must be able to gallop and be a bold jumper. For the light weight in these countries there is nothing to beat the thoroughbred horse. You have the pace and the stamina, and, above all, he does not tire you in the longest day's hunt. Indeed, there is nothing to beat the thoroughbred, to my mind, in any country, if—and it is a big if—you can only ride the weight.

In the rougher countries, where fields are not so

large, speed is not quite such a necessity, but a good jumper, that will not turn aside from anything, is essential. He must be handy, and have a good mouth and good temper.

A smaller, stockier class of horse is the best stamp for these parts: height about 15·3-16 hands; compactly built, short in the leg, with good withers, good bone, long, sloping shoulders and short back. He should be well balanced, with legs well under the body, and, above all, sound in wind and limb, to gallop and last for many hours at a stretch. A horse of this description is a typical mount for Kilkenny, West Meath, Galway, Duhallow and the Cork packs generally, and, indeed, will do well with most packs in Ireland.

Good horses can, as a rule, be hired in most hunting countries in Ireland. The general tariff is £2 a day, the rider taking responsibility in case of an accident, or £3 a day, the owner taking full responsibility.

Feeding and cost of upkeep is, on the whole, moderate, and works out at about £35 to £40 a horse per season, exclusive of cost of groom, whose wages would come to about 35s. a week.

I need hardly remind intending visitors that they should purchase their supplies, as far as possible, locally. Nothing does more to make hunting popular amongst the farmers than that they should find a ready sale for their oats, straw, and hay amongst the hunting men of the county, and surely it is only fair to buy your

oats, etc., from the men over whose land you ride, and on whose good will your sport depends.

It is well to bear in mind that in Ireland those who have a horse, or indeed any animal, to sell, frequently sail pretty near the wind in describing its perfections. Only the other day I heard a good example of this little failing.

A neighbour of mine, who is a very conscientious lady, wished to sell her cow because it was impossible to milk the animal. No amount of hobbling could prevent the cow from kicking, and anyone who tried to perform the operation carried his life in his hand. The steward was told to take the cow to a neighbouring fair, but on no account to sell her without warning any would-be purchaser of this fault. The man duly returned from the fair, having sold the cow at a very good price. His mistress was pleased and surprised, but a horrid doubt crept into her mind.

"I hope you told the truth, Ryan, about the cow," she said.

"Indade and I did, me lady," the steward replied. "I was axed if she was a good milker, and all I said was: 'Is it a good milker? Shure, you would be tired milking her.'"

The love of hunting and everything connected with it is deeply ingrained in the Irish character. It is a common sight to see a horse, evidently fresh from the plough, being walloped across country by a cheery

rider, minus saddle and stirrups, but determined to be in at the death, if at all possible. On one occasion I was amused to see a bare-legged "gossoon" astride a bullock, making good time across a couple of fields. Alas, the bullock swerved aside into the farmyard gate, pitching his rider into a manure heap!

Point-to-point races arranged by the various hunts have grown wonderfully in popular favour during recent years, and it is extraordinary what a number of country people turn up in every sort of conveyance to see them. Every hill or other point of vantage is crowded, and the enthusiasm displayed when a member of the local hunt wins the open race has to be seen to be believed.

These meetings are great fun, and provide the keenest racing imaginable, as some of the best horses and cross-country riders in Ireland take part in them.

If you are buying an animal with a bit of blood in him from a man in the South of Ireland, he is sure to add, by way of an extra inducement to the deal, that "he would make a grand 'point-to-pointer.'"

The late bad times have driven a number of hunting people out of the country, and, in consequence, there are any number of grooms and stablemen out of employment. A good Irish groom has two great virtues—he takes a pride in his horse and usually rides well. If he can drive a motor into the bargain, he becomes a most valuable addition to the staff, for Irish meets often entail hacking long distances to and from home.

The most satisfactory plan for anyone who intends hunting in Ireland would be to come over in the off season and see conditions for himself. He can then make up his mind with what pack he will throw in his lot. If he should happen to be a fisherman, this sport can be combined happily with arranging a hunting programme. I would like to emphasize the friendliness that strangers hunting in Ireland will experience from all classes, from the M.F.H. downwards. Quite apart from love of the sport, the country people realize what hunting and the money it brings in mean to them.

Those who have hunted in Ireland in the past will have pleasant memories of the sport that they have enjoyed there; but there are many good sportsmen who have not yet visited us, and if my attempt at describing hunting as it was, and is, in the country, induces some of them to give it a trial, I shall feel amply rewarded.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A FISHING HUT ON THE RIVER LEE

LIFE these days is apt to be a tiresome business. We demand so much from it that in return we get a spate of worries—times when business, health, and things domestic all go wrong. The only thing to do then is to get right away from it all, and to a fisherman a salmon river in spring offers a sure way of escape. To see a fresh salmon tumbling in a pool is wonderfully stimulating, even if all your efforts to lure him to his doom prove unavailing.

There are brave souls who fare forth directly the season opens, and cheerfully battle with the elements, wading up to the middle in icy water in the hopes of a 30 lb. springer. But the country is then dour and bleak, and all too often you are forced, for days on end, to contemplate a surging yellow flood and torrents of rain — days when you sympathize with the pessimist who, when cooped up in a lodge for nearly a week watching the rain streaming down the window-panes, employed his time in writing these charming lines in the game-book :

“ Dirty days hath September,
April, June and November.

From January up to May
The rain it raineth every day.
All the rest have thirty-one
Without a blessed gleam of sun.
And if any of them had two-and-thirty
They'd be just as wet and twice as dirty ! ”

I have known a man come over to Ireland for a fortnight's fishing in February and not get a single day's sport during the whole time.

Those who can patiently flog the river through a snowstorm, or with a north-east wind cutting through all the clothes they can put on, are to be admired, but give me my fishing holiday in April or the beginning of May. Then my river winds its way through hills aflame with gorse, wild flowers greet me everywhere, and I can sit beside the bank basking in the warm sunshine and let the peace and beauty of it all soak gently in. Even if it rains, the rain is soft and pleasant ; good for the grass and good for the fishing.

It is true you may strike a spell of dry weather, and find the river low and the fish sulky, with none of that delightful recklessness with which they sometimes take your lure in the early days of the season. But there are compensations in the long hours out of doors and also in the excitement of seeing salmon. In February I have often flogged a whole day, over long stretches of big, heavy water, without even seeing a fish.

I am lucky in having a friend who has some fishing

on the Lee in Co. Cork. This river runs down rapidly after a flood, becoming in places very shallow, and, in consequence, many of the beats are only good in high water. But my friend's fishing has deep pools where the salmon love to stand, and it gives good sport in both high and low water. Indeed, when the river runs very low, many salmon struggle up from the lower reaches to rest in it.

There is a little hut where two can sleep but a stone's throw from one of the best pools. You can sit on the verandah and hear the "splosh" of salmon leaping in it—surely sweet music to an angler's ear. You can go out and have a cast before breakfast when the mists are rising from the river and the countryside awakening to a new day, fresh and sparkling with dew, or you can fish away till it is too dark to see any more, and then have but a few hundred yards across a field to get home. This is the only way really to enjoy fishing, and often, too, the only way to fish with any hope of success, for, when the water is dead low and the days sunny, the early mornings and late evenings are the best times. If, as is so often the case, you have to make an expedition of many miles to and from the water, you arrive too late and have to leave before those magic evening hours, and so miss the chance—sometimes the only chance the day affords—of getting a fish.

I stayed about ten days at the hut, towards the end of



THE HUT : 2 RODS ; APRIL 26TH, 1927

April 1927, and never, except in Newfoundland, have I seen so many salmon showing themselves in a river. They were jumping here, there and everywhere. At a modest estimate some of the pools—which were all small—must have held between 300 and 400 fish.

The river was low and clear, almost at summer level, and they were mighty difficult to catch, which is usually the case when they are behaving like this. Still, on dark days, and especially in the mornings and evenings, we had a fair measure of success with a fly. A prawn, however, was always the more deadly, and for the first few days it was possible to fish wading down the pools and casting with a small rod and fine tackle. A prawn fished in this way is almost as good fun as fly-fishing.

As the days passed without the hoped-for rain, the river fell rapidly until, towards the end of my stay, we could not wade down the pools by day without disturbing fish. Then, when it was particularly bright, and all other methods proved hopeless, I am afraid we sometimes resorted to what is called “running a prawn.” This means wading in carefully, standing at the head of a pool and letting the prawn down to the salmon. The line is drawn from the reel very slowly, a few inches at a time, and there is just sufficient lead on it for the current to carry down the bait. When thirty yards or more of line are out, you reel up slowly again and try farther down. It is advisable to raise the point of the rod from time to time to see that your bait is running

down properly and is not stuck in the reeds or in the bottom ; and, where the current is slack, to use a cork on the line.

The whole art in this fishing is knowing when to strike while letting down the prawn, as it is at this time salmon usually take it. First of all a salmon will generally play with the prawn, taking it into his mouth and letting it go again, rolling over it and even striking it with his tail. He is not really keen on it and does not dash at it in the way he generally does when you are casting. The bait must stand a very critical inspection, and for this reason fresh prawns and fine tackle are essential to success. While the salmon is making up his mind about the prawn, the angler will feel several light tugs on the line. If he strikes at once, ten to one the bait will come away and he will only succeed in frightening the fish. If in the end the salmon determines to take the bait, he will seize the whole of it in his mouth and a more determined tug will be felt. Then is the time to strike, and strike hard, keeping your finger on the line, for, if you omit to do so, you will almost certainly fail to hook your fish. Sometimes a salmon will just nibble at a prawn as it goes down, and then there is a chance he will take it as it is being slowly reeled up past him again.

A back-breaking and wearisome way of fishing, this, and not a very sporting way either ; but at times it is very successful, and after many empty hours with a fly,

when your holiday is drawing to an end, there is some excuse.

At the end of May I paid another visit to the hut. The weather was still very dry and the river low and clear. In any case the Lee is an early river and the season was practically over. The main run of spring fish had gone right up the river and only a certain number lingered on in favourite pools. These salmon had seen life and had a very wholesome dread of *homo sapiens* and all his works.

My friend was having good sport fly-fishing in the method advocated by Mr Wood. Although it is claimed that the most suitable conditions for this method are low water with a high temperature, little or no wind and bright sunshine, these Lee salmon are a proverbially sulky breed, and while I was there he did not do much good except on dull days with a light breeze. It was very late in the evenings that he had the most success. He caught three one evening—hooking the last salmon at about eleven-thirty P.M., in pitch darkness and a rainstorm—and two the next.

On the first evening I was fishing the same water in the orthodox way, with a largish fly, which is generally held to be the correct thing when it is getting dark, but I did not get a single rise. My rod was a clumsy brute of 17 ft., and my line too heavy for delicate work. The following evening I armed myself with a trout rod, thinking that at any rate I would get some

trout for the *ménage*. Noticing that moths were floating down one pool and both salmon and trout were rising freely, I explored my fly-book, and, to my joy, found a very similar moth in it. I put this up, and, at the third cast, hooked a salmon. The struggle was an exciting one, but, unfortunately, in the end, after a wild obstacle race down the bank, and when it was getting too late to see what was happening, I lost him, as one so often does on these wretched small hooks.

Mr Wood can best explain why his flies appeal to a salmon in summer, as they undoubtedly do. The dressing is very light and short, and I miss the big, gaudy hackle which appeals to us old-fashioned fishermen so much and intrigues us into buying more useless flies for our already over-stocked collection. What I do like about these "Wood's" flies is that, in spite of their small size, they have a businesslike-looking hook, with a long shank. When salmon are rising short, not caring overmuch whether they seize the fly as it passes or not, this extra length may make the difference between hooking a salmon or just missing him.

The Lee is a good example of how much better many Irish rivers are looked after these days. During the time I stayed at the hut, hardly a day or night passed without seeing water-bailiffs or police patrolling along the river bank. The result of their good work is best seen in the increased number of salmon which succeed in getting up the river, and as far as the



THE RIVER LEE NEAR MACROOM

lake at Inchigiehela, which is a favourite spawning-ground.

In the old days much of the fishing on the Lee was owned by big landlords, who seldom lived on the spot. Whether they kept the fishing in their own hands or let it, their one idea was to get as much out of the river as possible. With a few exceptions they did little or nothing for its better preservation, nor would they join together in subscribing the necessary funds. The river was over-netted at the mouth and in low water very few salmon got past the weirs and other danger spots in the lower reaches. In summer, when salmon gathered in large numbers in the few deep pools the river possesses, wholesale poisoning was carried on and few spawning fish running up its tributaries escaped ; in fact it became a hopeless river except in the early part of the season in high water.

When most of the landlords sold out under the Land Act, and the farmers living along the river became the proprietors of the fishing rights, many foretold that the river was doomed, but exactly the reverse has been the case. The farmers were quick to realize the value of their fishings, also the fact that they have to pay heavy rates on them. The majority let their fishing, and they cannot afford to miss the chance of a good rent by allowing the water to be ruined by poaching.

Anglers' clubs have been formed, at Cork and elsewhere, whose members are mostly local business men

and good sportsmen, only too glad to help in putting down poaching. Some lessees and owners of fishing adopt the excellent plan of occasionally giving these clubs a free day for a limited number of rods, thus enlisting their sympathy and help.

Public opinion, generally, is gradually hardening against poachers, and, for the first time in the river's history, steps are being taken to restrict netting in the tidal waters. As more funds are now available for preservation, the number and efficiency of the bailiffs are increasing and the Civic Guard give every assistance.

Poaching is, of course, far from being entirely put down—indeed, in Ireland, it is questionable whether it ever will be—but a man can now take a fishing on the Lee with every hope that the salmon will be there and, provided that weather conditions are favourable, he will have good sport.

The farmer from whom our fishing is leased is an excellent fisherman. For some years he fished the water himself with considerable success, until his farm claimed too much of his time. Now he contents himself with a little trout-fishing in the evenings, and assisting our efforts with much valuable advice and criticism. Usually a shy and reserved sort of man, he came to the hut one night in a wild state of excitement, with perspiration pouring down his face and carrying a nice salmon of about twelve pounds. Refreshed by a bottle of stout, he told us how

he caught the salmon, and it must be admitted that it was a thrilling experience. Fishing down one of the pools with an "Olive Quill" as tail-fly and a "Hawthorn" as dropper on a very light trout cast, he hooked a salmon on the dropper. After playing the fish up and down the stream for about half-an-hour, and just as things were beginning to quieten down a bit, a big trout took the tail-fly. The trout marked its displeasure at finding itself suddenly anchored to a salmon by making frantic efforts to escape, jumping about all over the place and awakening the salmon into renewed activity. For a few minutes he had both fish on together, and the strain on the cast was terrific.

Eventually, much to the farmer's relief, the trout broke the gut and escaped. After that he settled down to a ding-dong battle with the salmon, which lasted over an hour. When both angler and salmon were thoroughly exhausted, a neighbour fortunately came to the rescue, and, wading into the river, succeeded in tailing the fish.

This farmer was a great expert in worm-fishing in low water, and was never happy until you gave one or two of his favourite worm casts a trial where the current was just right and the bottom a nice gravelly one. He took the business very seriously indeed, and became most annoyed unless you followed his instructions to the letter. First of all a special variety of worms—"Blue Heads," he called them—had to be procured from a farm some miles away. Then, you must stand

at the exact spot he indicated and cast across stream, with just enough lead on to allow the bait to bump slowly along the bottom to where the salmon are lying, and to keep "rambling amongst their noses," as he put it. If you feel a tug, instead of striking you must let out more line immediately and continue to do so while walking down the bank after the salmon. If a fish is given plenty of line and ample time to swallow the worms before you raise the point of the rod, you seldom lose him, was his dictum—on the principle of "give a man plenty of rope and he will hang himself."

Having landed a fine salmon in this way, and when the first transports of joy had passed, I must confess to a slight feeling of shame. This feeling was intensified when a fly enthusiast, who had caught nothing, characterized my efforts as "poaching tricks." "Why not go the whole hog and try stroke-hauling, foul-hooking, poisoning, and all the rest of it?" was his crushing comment.

By the way, I have always wondered how poachers discovered the use of spurge for poisoning salmon. This plant (*Euphorbia hiberna*) grows freely in Cork and Kerry, and, when picked, it exudes a milky substance. If, in low water, enough of it is crushed and emptied into a pool, it very soon stupefies or intoxicates the fish in it, causing them to float about in a helpless way on the surface, when they can be easily

caught. At one time many a river was ruined by this disgraceful trick, which is, fortunately, now not nearly so common.

Several of the neighbours used to drop in at the hut of an evening for a cup of "tay" and a chat. Among them was an old Kerry doctor, and he enlightened me as to how this wonderful discovery of such far-reaching importance to the poaching business was first made.

"Like most of the divilment in this world," said he, "a woman was at the bottom of it. About seventy years ago, in the little village of Kilgarvan, near Kenmare, there lived a Mrs Brady. Her husband was a carrier. Once a week he used to drive the whole way to Cork with butter. He always wore one of those old-fashioned tall stove-pipe hats, and when he had sold the butter in Cork he put the tickets showing the prices it fetched into his hat. Every Sunday he would sit on the chapel steps and dole out these tickets and the money to all the farmers round. His memory was wonderful, for, although neither he nor any of the others could read or write, he never made a mistake.

"Well, now, to get back to Mrs Brady. She had a petticoat which she wished to dye. The juice of spurge, when boiled down, turns a beautiful magenta colour, making a very lasting dye, which has long been known to the country people. So Mrs Brady crushed some of the plants to extract the juice, and emptied what she

did not want into a small stream at the back of the house. Soon afterwards, one of her sons noticed trout floating about on the surface, dead or dying. Being a sharp youth, he was not long in linking up cause and effect and carrying out a series of remarkably successful experiments on his own. The good news spread rapidly among the poachers of the Kingdom and across the borders into the neighbouring county of Cork. I never heard that the poachers gave the poor woman anything—not even a testimonial—although many who have done much less for the poor people of Ireland have had statues put up to them and brass bands playing to their memory.”

The doctor did not consider spurge-poisoned fish actually harmful to the consumer, as the effect is entirely on the respiratory organs. The ordinary man would not notice any difference in their appearance, but experts say they can detect them by a certain white look about the gills. He always knew the men who were using spurge because, when they were pulping it in large quantities, some of the poison invariably got into their eyes, causing them to become red and inflamed.

Poisoned salmon decompose very rapidly owing to the want of aeration in the blood. Years ago a dealer, who did a large business in them, told me that, except that the price was cut a bit, this did not matter. “Over beyant in London they dosed the salmon with vinegar

and mixed it up in some stuff they called 'salmon may-on-aisy,' and the people would not know the differ." A comforting thought, this, when you are next enjoying the delicacy in a London restaurant.

When the doctor had finished his tea, I accompanied him part of his way home. As we breasted the hill we got a glorious view of the distant Kerry mountains. He stopped to light a pipe, and after gazing at them for a moment said, in a voice tinged with that melancholy habitual to Irish people when recalling the glorious past: "We used to have great times over there in the old days. I remember, when I was a young medical student, I used to be kept up half the night stitching up the men's heads after a fair day. Whenever the people gathered together in any number, there was bound to be a row between the different clans and factions. Sometimes the police would disperse them, but they would meet again at a public-house half-way between Kilgarvan and Kenmare to fight it out. They gave each other dreadful cracks with sticks; you would think some of them could hardly live. But, bless you, man, after I had patched them up they would be out again ploughing the next day as blithe and songful as the larks in heaven."

Visits from old characters like this, full of quaint stories of the countryside, are some of the many pleasures of life in the wilds of Muskerry. It is wonderful what a simple and pleasant thing life is when there is good

salmon-fishing at your door, when griddle-cakes, eggs and milk can be got from a near-by farm, and when the only communication from the outside world is the postman coming across the fields with a fresh supply of prawns.



Photo : B. D. Holberton

"THE DAY WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY PROVIDE A LENGTHY
BATTLE WITH A SALMON"

CHAPTER NINE

A CONNEMARA ESTUARY

LEAVING Galway, and skirting Lough Corrib, the motorist is soon in the wilds of Connemara, with its mountains, lakes, bogs and grey boulders everywhere. A district which cannot fail to appeal to the sportsman, or to the artist. The very names of the mountains—The Devil's Mother, The Maum Turc Mountains, The Twelve Pins of Bunna-beola—are enough to excite the imagination, but the ever-changing colours on their slopes baffle description. It is as if in this moist atmosphere Nature finds a sufficiently sensitive canvas to experiment with all her lovely rainbow hues ; then, dissatisfied with the result, she blurs the picture with mists, or completely blots it out in order to start afresh. Very beautiful it all is to the sensible man who is determined to do nothing save enjoy the passing hour, but the artist is apt to find it trying both to skill and temper. Just as he thinks he has caught the colour on a distant mountain, it changes from purple shadow to golden light, and he has to begin all over again.

One day a friend of mine was painting a Connemara landscape when an old countryman came along. After gazing at her work for some time he remarked sagely :

" 'Tis a grand picture you're after painting, me lady, shure you have got the complexion of the counthry." He could not have paid her a nicer compliment, but I am afraid "the complexion of the counthry" is too elusive to be depicted faithfully in either oils or water-colours.

Generally the first evidence of any human habitation in this lonely country is the smell of turf fire, and it is then only with difficulty that a tiny thatched cottage can be seen clinging to the bare hillside. Scanty as the population is, it is all too large for a land of mountain and bog suited only to sheep and fairies. The peasantry are a very likeable race, with all that old-fashioned dignity and charm seldom met with nowadays. There are no industries except farming—a pathetic effort to wring a livelihood from what is certainly the worst land in Ireland—and, near the coast, fishing, which is carried out in a primitive and half-hearted way.

Poverty is never far away, and any calamity, such as a wet year for turf, or disease among the wretched potato crops, plunges many of the inhabitants into the depths. Emigration to America is more than ever draining the country of its youth, but, to their credit be it said, the emigrants seldom fail to send a goodly proportion of their earnings back to the old people.

Years ago I got my first glimpse of Connemara. It was during naval manœuvres, and the ship I was in remained for several days snugly concealed in Killary

Bay—that beautiful arm of the sea which winds its way like a Norwegian fiord right into the heart of mountains, rising sheer from the sea on both sides.

Black-faced sheep, grazing on their green slopes, seemed but a stone's throw from our anchorage, and occasional gaps permitted views of all the wild country of bogs and lakes behind. At the head of the bay a fine salmon river ran down to the sea, and several inhabitants came on board with wonderful descriptions of the fishing. Shore leave could not be obtained, and it was all very tantalizing. I determined then to explore this country at leisure on the first opportunity, but it was not until after many weary years abroad that I found myself free to do so.

At first, as is so often the case, my experiences were disappointing. I remembered the salmon river and made for it, under the innocent delusion that it was practically virgin water, and that the fish were only waiting for my fly. I found most of the river let and the rest fished to distraction by an army of hopeful anglers at so much a day. Many fishing hotels and the gillies attached to them are anathema to me. Crowds, discomfort and expense often made matters worse. Only towards the end of my visit did I succeed in finding a little cottage, with some fishing, which just suits my modest requirements. I look forward, now, to returning there every year, when, with the approach of June, the call of a sea-trout river becomes too strong to be resisted.

Let me try to describe the place. Around the cottage are a few straggling rhododendrons and other shrubs, an acre or so of coarse meadow covered with wild flowers and, beyond, peat bogs stretching away on every side to the mountains. A few minutes' walk across the moor, where the turf is cut in slabs and laid out to dry—for all the world like freshly made chocolate—brings you to what is called a river in these parts. In reality it is nothing more than a tidy stream, which can be fished with ease with a twelve-foot rod. The river—not to deny it its local dignity—has its source in some lakes, and meanders in a gentle way, clear pebbly shallows alternating with dark peaty pools, through three or four miles of moorland to the sea.

In dry weather it runs rapidly, low and clear, and is then useless for fishing, but a few hours' heavy rain works a miracle. From the surrounding mountains white ribbons of water come tumbling down, erstwhile stagnant bog-holes quickly overflow, and in an incredibly short time the gentle stream changes to a raging torrent of amber, and the fisherman's mood of hopeless despair to one of wild joy, for the opportunity he has so patiently awaited has at last arrived. The river subsides almost as quickly as it rises, but at any rate for a day or two there is every chance of good sport, with salmon and trout making their mad rush up from the sea to the spawning-grounds in the lakes.

Disappointment is often the lot of a fisherman in

Connemara, but to be beside one of its little rivers after a June spate, armed with a light rod and tackle, is worth it all. The day will almost certainly provide a lengthy battle with a salmon, and many a lively tussle with sea-trout. All around are the bogs redolent of bog-myrtle, and what better music can the heart of man desire than the calling of curlew, the drumming of snipe, and the joyous song of countless larks.

The estuary, where the river falls down to the sea in a series of rocky pools and waterfalls, is a most attractive place.

During my stay the weather was very fine, and the water in consequence dead low. With each tide sea-trout, and occasionally salmon, struggled up into the lower pools, but by day it was impossible to get them to look at anything except a worm. Late in the evening I got sea-trout with a fly in the lowest pool of all, when the tide was out. After a hot summer's day there are few things pleasanter than to go down at dusk to such a pool near the sea, with the silence all round unbroken save for the occasional splash of a fish, the subdued murmurings of the waters, or the weird cry of some sea-bird. It must be confessed that the fishing demands little skill beyond that required to play a fish in the dark and to avoid tangles. The colour of the fly, too, matters little, but very late I often found a "Coachman" or "White Moth" effective. Actually, in salt water, I never had any success with salmon or trout, although

in some Scottish estuaries good sport is obtained by wading out in the sea at certain states of the tide. Possibly if I had tried a sand-eel, or some such bait, the results might have been different.

When fishing offered no hope of success, the estuary was a delightful place to laze away a warm summer day. One could look out at a sea blue and calm as the Mediterranean at its best, and through the haze trace the dim outline of Achill and, in the near distance, Inishboffin, Inishark, and the many other islands of this beautiful coast.

Rock pools left by the tide have always fascinated me, since the days when, armed with a bucket and net, I raided them for crabs, shrimps, starfish, sea-anemones and other delectable things. The bottom pool of the river, before it widened into the estuary—where the water was always brackish and the rock covered with seaweed—possessed some of this wonderful marine life, with the additional attraction of a school of sea-trout and now and then a salmon left behind when the tide went out. Lying on an overhanging ledge of rock one could see all that went on in the crystal pool below, yet remain concealed from the sharp eyes of the fish. Here I spent many happy hours.

Up a river fish often lie motionless for long periods, nose against the current, but here their behaviour was very different. Sea-trout would dash round and round the pool as if engaged in some game. Every now and

then there would be a gleam of silver in the depths as one turned over. Often sheer *joie de vivre* compelled them to throw themselves four or five feet into the air. When salmon chanced to be in the pool they would join in these games, but in a more dignified way, and were treated with great respect by the trout. The trout would wait for the salmon to begin and then follow everywhere they chose to lead.

Although sea-trout were able to get up the river in practically any state of the water, in dry weather salmon seldom ventured farther than the tidal pools. They seemed to know that there was not enough water for them in the river. Indeed, their instinct was marvellous, for it warned them of a break in the weather a day or so before it came. Scores of salmon, and sea-trout by the hundred, would then struggle up to the lower pools, ready for a mad rush as soon as the water rose. Salmon seemed to know, too, when a second and bigger spate was to follow on the heels of the first, and would await it in preference.

Precarious as is the life of salmon and trout in fresh water, it seems to be equally fraught with danger when in the sea. Watching the pool one day from my rock, I saw a fair-sized conger-eel, about four feet in length, wriggling among the seaweed like a snake in the grass. At the tail of the pool there were several small sea-trout. At first I did not realize what was afoot. Gliding forward with great stealth, and almost concealed by

weed, the conger manœuvred into a position underneath the trout—then, suddenly darting upward, with a speed of which I had not thought it capable, it seized one of them in its powerful jaws and disappeared, gulping it down.

Many of the sea-trout bore evidence of the attack of gannets and other sea-birds in the shape of deep gashes and scars on their backs. A pair of grey seals took up their residence in the bay and often came right up the estuary at high tide. They devoted themselves chiefly to the salmon, and seemed to take a cruel delight in chasing a shoal and nipping the fish right and left from sheer wanton mischief. When in need of a meal they could devour a big salmon in the water with ease. Salmon and trout half eaten were often found on the rocks, but this was generally the work of otters.

Sometimes one of the seals would lie basking on a rock for hours watching the bay. With the splash of a salmon, or any commotion in the water, it would slip silently into the sea and swim over with incredible swiftness to investigate. In an estuary like this seals do an enormous amount of damage by killing and wounding fish, besides preventing many from entering the river.

When the incoming tide brought sea-trout up into the estuary, cormorants would leave the rocks, and even herons appeared by magic to exact their toll, but, in spite of all, the lives of salmon and sea-trout appear to be singularly joyous and free from care.

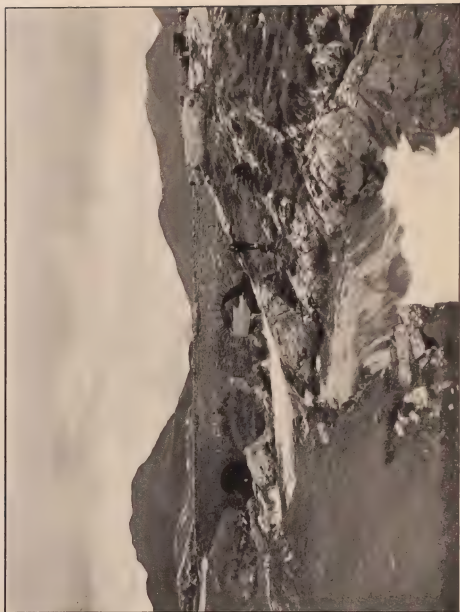


Photo : B. D. Hallberton

" WHERE THE RIVER FALLS DOWN TO THE SEA IN A SERIES OF ROCKY POOLS AND WATERFALLS "

With the first half-hour or so of a flood, when the water in the river is just rising, comes the angler's golden opportunity, but unfortunately he is seldom on the spot to take advantage of it. Salmon then, in their mad excitement, rise readily to a fly, and often chase it half across a pool in their determination to have it. Afterwards, when the river ceases rising, and while the spate lasts, salmon take in the most unlikely places: but when all is over, and the life of the river becomes normal again, it is of supreme importance not only to know the best pools in the river, but also to know the few yards in these pools where the fish generally lie. Concentration on these spots is one of the secrets of success.

At ordinary times a salmon often will not move an inch from where he is standing to inspect the many wares the angler offers him. If a fly is made to dance in an attractive way, time after time, just in front of his nose, he may end by snapping it, possibly out of sheer irritation. Similarly, in very low water and bright sunshine, when he will not look at a fly, he may be persuaded to take a prawn, if dangled repeatedly over his head.

In these little Connemara rivers the angler is sometimes helped by being able to see the salmon lying in a pool, and from a point of vantage his gillie can tell him the result of his efforts. This is taking rather an unfair advantage of the salmon, but certainly adds at times to the thrills and excitement of fishing.

Approaching one of the pools near the estuary one day, I was overjoyed to see a fine salmon of fully twenty pounds—a monster for this river, where the average weight is six to ten pounds—lying at the tail of it. For days before, the pool had been untenanted, and I determined to get him, and to spend the whole day over the business if necessary. The sun was shining straight on the pool, and with the water crystal clear the chances with a fly were small. Still, one never knows the vagaries of a salmon's mood, and it is always right to start with a fly before descending to bait. Pat, the gillie, insisted on my trying a local pattern, a "Gillaroo," I think he called it, after that strange species of trout, with a stomach strengthened like a bird's gizzard, which inhabits some of the lakes in these parts. Gillies are never content unless you try their pet flies. Certainly until their novelty wears off these strange creations are sometimes very useful when fishing other waters. The fly seemed to me to be a crude copy of a "Fiery Brown," and quite failed to make any impression on the salmon. Personally, I am content to stick to a few old and tried favourites, such as "Jock Scott," "Black Doctor," or "Silver Doctor," and I afterwards put up a very small specimen of the latter. When this fly sailed round in front of the salmon, Pat became wildly excited and shouted that "he was after taking it." Unfortunately the salmon was not at all "after taking it." The fly aroused sufficient

curiosity for him to follow it a short distance, and then decide against it. After this all my attempts to move the fish with a fly proved unavailing, and I fell back on a small shrimp mounted on a single hook. There was just sufficient current to bring this bait nicely in front of the salmon. To my astonishment he would have none of it, although I gave him repeated opportunities. Unfortunately I had no fresh shrimps, and even the best of the preserved variety have a horrid smell, which was quite enough to upset such a fastidious gentleman.

At this stage of the proceedings I sat down and lit a pipe. The situation was getting desperate. The salmon was lying in precisely the same spot as when I first saw him nearly two hours ago, and all my efforts, which included several bungled casts, had only succeeded in boring him to the verge of somnolence. Pat was just as keen to have the salmon on the bank as I was, and if left to himself probably would have done so long ago by ways which would not bear the telling. "'Tis a pity," said he, "to leave such a grand salmon in the river." This remark seemed to me so obvious as not to require an answer. After smoking for some time in silence he started again in a gentle, persuasive voice: "He would shurely take a fresh shrimp, if it was put before him tasty-like."

Certainly fresh shrimps might make all the difference, and there was just the chance that some could be got

from a fisherman who lived about a mile away. So Pat went off post-haste to try to get hold of him, and I filled in the time making a futile search for young curlew, while the parent birds flew back and forth, hovering at times just over my head, and filling the valley with their warning cries. Pat was more successful, however, and returned with shrimps which had been caught only that morning and hurriedly boiled. They looked most appetising, being very red and just the right size. My luck seemed in, as the salmon was still there, and, directed by Pat, I let a shrimp down on a fine gut-cast until it was almost touching the fish's nose. This proved too much for him, and I soon felt a gentle tug, followed by a more determined one. I struck hard, and was "in him."

After all one has imagined and read about it, the play of a salmon is often rather a disappointing business, and lacking in excitement. But the play of this salmon was something quite different; in its wild abandon it resembled that of a sea-trout.

First of all he circled the pool twice at lightning speed, then jumped high and dry on to a rock and slid back again. He made wild rushes in every direction, and leaped high out of the water. With my light rod I was quite powerless to control him. I thought he must be foul-hooked, but I saw this was not the case when, in spite of me, he tumbled down a waterfall into the pool below. Slippery rocks made it extremely difficult to

keep up, as he now seemed determined to return to the sea. The river was here a mass of rocks and very shallow. Once the line got twisted round a boulder in the middle of the stream, but was freed again with the aid of the gaff. After what seemed a lifetime of this nerve-racking business, I got sufficient control over the fish to steer him clear of some of the obstacles. The end seemed to be in sight when he made another desperate dash downstream. Suddenly the strain on the rod eased—there was that sickening sensation of a slack line. I reeled up frantically, but it was all over. The hook's hold had given with the long struggle, and the line drifted back to me across the water. A well-earned victory brought glorious freedom to the salmon, but to me came that anguish, most poignant and enduring, which follows the loss of a good fish. After such a long-drawn prelude to adventure it was doubly hard to bear. The thought of it and the strident voice of a corncrake underneath my window kept me awake that night.

I am ashamed to confess that months afterwards I found myself going over the battle again in church. Every fisherman knows the sort of thing—"If I had only exercised more patience and given the salmon time to take the shrimp properly before striking! If I had done so-and-so and not so"—*ad nauseam*. "If 'ifs' and 'ands' were pots and pans," well, that salmon might have ornamented one of these utensils!

My holiday was drawing to a swift close, and with it

my salmon-fishing for the season. After such a disappointing experience I was more than ever anxious to feel the thrill of being "in a fish" before packing up my rods for good, so I took a day on one of the lakes which was full of salmon. One could see them jumping all over it, or coming lazily to the surface with beautiful "head and tail" rises; but not a ripple of wind stirred the water shimmering under the hot sun, and the fish would not look at anything.

I have never taken kindly to lake-fishing from a boat. The long drift before the wind and the continuous casting are monotonous enough, were it not that you are ever buoyed up by the hope of hooking a salmon, or an immense trout. Of course nothing can take away from the excitement of the actual moment of rising and hooking a salmon, wherever it takes place, but the subsequent play loses some of its interest, for its success depends a great deal on your boatman's skill as well as on your handling of the fish.

Unfortunately, days which best suit fishing on a lake are those when the surface is whipped into a nasty choppy sea by half-a-gale, and when you are lashed from time to time by pitiless showers. Only the chance of a salmon can compensate for the discomforts of being in a boat under such conditions, and the happiest moment often comes when you step over the bows on to the rocks of some small island in the middle of the lake for lunch. Indeed, after several blank hours, only

the hope of better things prevents you from landing sooner.

If the waters of a lake are ruffled by a nice breeze from the right direction, and the day is not too bright, there is always a chance of sea-trout. These fish generally lie close inshore, off headlands, or in bays, and generally go in shoals. It is, therefore, a mistake to hurry away from any spot on a lake or river where you have caught one. A favourite spot in some lakes seems to be just on the fringe of weeds or water-lilies. This entails delicate casting to avoid entanglements, and to play a trout among the waxen flowers is a picturesque but risky business.

In Connemara, when salmon and sea-trout fishing is quite hopeless, an expedition to some little lake tucked away in the mountains, after "brownies," is always a pleasant way of spending a day. The climb is often stiff enough, but there is much to interest one by the way—on a clear day, views of mountains stretching away on every side, of moors and lakes, and of many a river winding down to the Atlantic. The absence of trees is a sad feature of a Connemara landscape. Seen from a distance the very bareness of the mountain slopes makes them look savage, and indeed almost repellent in a hard light; but the profusion and variety of wild flowers make it a constant pleasure to ramble over them. "London Pride" and other rock-plants spring up in a marvellous way from between rocky

crevices. Banks of foxgloves give a wonderful touch of colour, and that lovely plant, the giant bell heath (*Dabeocia*) is fairly common. Damp spots are made beautiful by luxuriant masses of Osmunda fern, montbretia and orchids remarkable for size and colour. The true maidenhair fern, and even the rare Killarney fern, are to be found by the earnest searcher, although some maintain that the latter does not grow outside the confines of the Kingdom of Kerry.

Of bird life there is little, but such as there is is in keeping with the wild surroundings. Unfortunately the day is past when one could hope to see a golden eagle hovering over the heights. These birds are now, I believe, extinct in Ireland. The last of the race was caught in a trap in Co. Donegal, in May 1926. Peregrines are not uncommon, and I have been told that in former days these falcons often battled with the eagles and drove them from their territory. About ten years ago such a fight was witnessed on Bengob Mountain, near Letterfrach, when, after nearly an hour of fierce aerial combat, the peregrine drove the eagle to earth so badly wounded that it succumbed to its injuries. The croak of a raven is sometimes heard from the crags overhead, and I have once seen a hen-harrier.

While crossing a Connemara bog, in June 1926, I got a brief glimpse through the rushes of a bittern. Years ago these interesting birds were common enough in Irish bogs, and Goldsmith was familiar

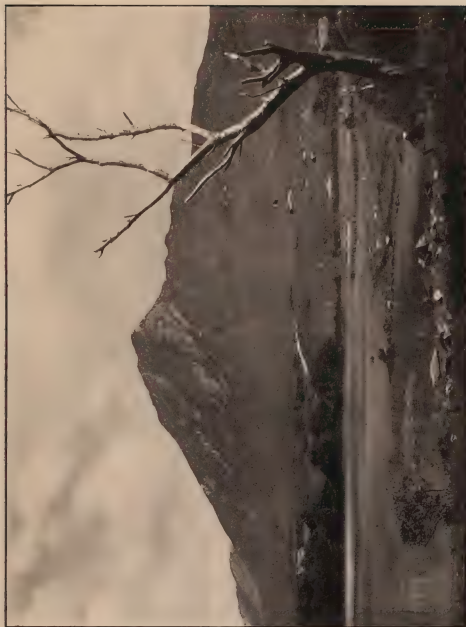


Photo : B. D. Holberton

BEN GOB OR DIAMOND MOUNTAIN, LETTERFRACH, CONNEMARA

with the bird's solitary habits and peculiar booming note :

“ Along the glades, a solitary guest,
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest.”

But it has shared the fate of other rare birds at the hands of “ the lout with a gun,” and hardly a year passes without several instances being reported of the bittern trying to return to her bogs only to be promptly shot. One was shot in Co. Kerry as recently as February 1928.

Owing to lack of feeding, the trout in these mountain tarns are sometimes dark and lanky, but in many a lake at a high altitude I have found them plump and pink of flesh. Where they are small in size they make up for it in numbers, and, if there is a rise on, any small lake-fly will serve to fill a basket.

When the shadows on the mountains darken to deepest indigo, or crimson with the sunset are mirrored in turn on the black surface of the lake, it is with real regret that one starts for home. The very inaccessibility of the lake may prevent another visit, and all too often it remains but a pleasant memory.

CHAPTER TEN

“NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN”

A MAN whose main interest in life is bridge once told me that of all field sports salmon-fishing bored him the least. Salmon-fishing certainly resembles bridge in one respect, for, after a lifetime devoted to it, you are still left with an absorbing interest in its problems.

Looking back over my experience gained during many seasons' salmon-fishing, both good and bad, the one fact that emerges clearly is that there is always something new to be learned about the game. The old adage that there is “nothing new under the sun” may be true enough when applied to the ordinary happenings of life, but in salmon-fishing it is just “under the sun” that the results of the more recent methods become most patent. Some of these methods, it is true, prove more successful in one country than in another. There has been a good deal written about dry-fly fishing for salmon, for example, and it has been tried with great success for some years in America, but in Ireland, although I have tried the dry fly repeatedly under perfect conditions—except that the temperature of the water was probably never high enough—I have never found it very satisfactory, and

have succeeded in catching only a few salmon on it. On the other hand, I have had first-rate sport with Mr A. H. Wood's method of fishing, with the line greased and the fly just submerged. Of course this method is now well known on the Dee, and other rivers in Scotland, but it has not yet been tried to the same extent on Irish rivers, where I am convinced that it has great possibilities. I hope, therefore, that the results of my experiments may be of some interest to fishermen.

Before reading one of Mr Wood's articles, I had been content to rely on the orthodox methods of fishing, with standard flies, shrimps, or the various spinning baits, according to the state of the water ; but I found that there were a good many days, especially in sun and low-water conditions, when it seemed almost hopeless to go on fishing. I think now that it is always possible to do so with hope of success—in fact, the word "hopeless" should be erased from the salmon-fisher's vocabulary.

I have never had an opportunity of seeing anyone fishing in the way Mr Wood describes who really knew how it should be done, and therefore I may be wrong in describing my amateur efforts as his method, but the article certainly led me to try a new way which resulted in a striking success.

I used an eleven-foot trout rod, as I found I could not cover the water properly without over-wading with

anything shorter. The various sizes of special "Wood's low-water flies," as listed by Hardy, down to the smallest, according to the water—a light line, and a long lake-trout cast, to which I added two or three lengths of fine points. These latter look at first too fine for salmon-fishing, but by renewing them frequently I found this tackle quite adequate, and only broke in one fish this season, due to his getting round a rock. I found a fly called "The Logie," in various sizes, to be so effective that I really cannot say I gave any of the others a fair trial. I dare say they would have been quite as good if—and it is an all-important if—used in the right sizes.

With the line well greased, I started to work in low water on a smooth stream, with a nice run in it. I knew it held fish which I and others had failed to stir with ordinary sunk flies. When looking across the river there was practically no difference in the rate of flow in any point of the stream, and by casting almost straight across I found that the fly came nicely round.

One of the chief pleasures in fishing with the greased line is that you can see exactly where your fly is, and also invariably the rise of the salmon. I had not been at it very long when I saw a slight wave coming after my fly, followed by a splendid and most dignified "head and tail" rise. I know I did not remember what one ought to do about striking, but when his tail was going down I tightened in him, and after a struggle, which seemed to me, accustomed as I was to full-sized rods, to be

a most exciting one, duly landed a nice fish of twelve pounds.

Salmon do not always rise head and tail, but I find that, owing to the fact that the fly is on the surface, it is usually possible to see something indicating a rise, and I am sure I have often missed fish by striking too quickly. A firm but not too quick raising of the rod after seeing the rise seems to be the best plan. Provided that the line is straight when the fly has come fairly well round down-stream—the most usual time for a rise—I do not think that it is really necessary to strike at all with these very fine wire hooks.

It must always be rather a moot point whether a fish would not have taken an ordinary sunk fly fished on an equally fine cast; but I have certainly done better fishing with this greased-line business than others fishing the same river in the orthodox way. On several days I have landed three or four, and on one occasion five, fish with it during a day's fishing on rivers where these numbers are rather unusual. The "Wood's" method, too, has enabled me to prolong my salmon-fishing through the summer months on early rivers, like the Suir, which seldom yield much sport after May when fished in the ordinary way.

In the whole gamut of fishing emotions there is nothing to equal the thrill experienced when you have just hooked a big fresh-run spring salmon, and fish which have been up the river some time have never

quite the same interest. Still, there is a great fascination about fishing in this way in summer when the water is low. You know where the salmon are lying and you can see that your fly is fishing properly. In many instances you even expect the rise of a particular fish at a certain spot, and can watch your fly approaching it. With a light rod, and on fine tackle, there is, too, plenty of excitement to be got out of the play of a salmon, especially in a river like the Suir, where they run large. But the advantages of the "Wood's" method are by no means confined to summer. Long spells of dry, warm weather sometimes come in spring, when the river is low, and although there are plenty of salmon in it, it is seldom possible to get a stir out of them except with a prawn. At such times it has yielded me good sport when fly-fishermen, who were whipping the water in the old-fashioned way, were full of complaints.

One thing I have noticed is that I seem to lose much fewer fish. Of course the light rod necessitates gentle handling and the taking of no risks which are avoidable. Also, the salmon is generally well hooked owing to the way he rises, and the special hooks, with long shanks and wide gape, are a great help when using small flies.

Some people consider it essential to use a light rod in order to avoid breaking such fine casts, and it is undoubtedly a fact that in the hooking and playing of even a large fish the use of a small rod is not nearly

such a handicap as it may at first seem to be. A single-handed rod, too, is also so much more pleasant to use under suitable conditions. I always bear in mind, however, what an old fisherman said to me when I asked him where would be the most likely place to get a fish: "In the middle of the river," he replied. In other words, it is essential to cover the water, and, when the stream is wide, or the wind strong, I never hesitate to use a full-sized salmon rod. Indeed, with a little care in striking and playing a fish, it is sometimes more effective, except in narrow streams, as it enables one to keep farther away from where salmon are lying.

When fishing the Suir last season I had what seemed to me a proof of the superiority of this almost floating-fly method. It was a sunny afternoon in June, and my companion had just fished without result, with a fly, in the ordinary way, a particularly good short cast, called in Ireland "a neck"—that is, a narrowing of the river at the head of a series of rapids. We were about to leave the river, but, before doing so, I thought I would just try this particular cast, and, within half-an-hour of its being fished, I hooked well out in the stream a fish of nineteen pounds. I really think that my getting this fish was due to the use of fine tackle and greased line.

Some twenty yards farther down I met a second fish, and on this occasion saw him come up quite slowly from deep water and take the fly. I was taking advantage of a long rod to stand well back from the high bank,

and could only just see over the top. If I had stood on the edge of the bank he would certainly have seen me, and, although the actual rise may have been due to the very fine cast, and to the fly being just on the surface, I think the fact of his taking it was due to my invisibility. Unfortunately I had just been persuaded to put up as a dropper a "March Brown," on which I had caught a fish the evening before, and, having succeeded in bringing the salmon close to the bank, I had the mortification of seeing the wretched dropper get fast in some weeds, the direct pull on the light cast resulting in an instant break. I was thus robbed of the reward of my foresight by the mistake of fishing a dropper on fine tackle—an experiment which I shall not repeat.

The usual practice in Ireland is to use larger flies for evening fishing, but I have found that one does much better fishing a small fly. A very likely time for a fish in May or June is about ten P.M., when it is almost dark, and I have often killed a fish then on a small fly. In fact, in my experience, the larger flies late in the evening at this time of the year seem to be definitely less successful.

Even when the river is in really high flood there is seldom a day when a fish cannot be taken out of it with that dreadful-looking contraption—a bait of worms. On our river, when such a flood is expected, excitement runs high, and "chaps" are fired off in all directions

on bicycles to secure a special brand of worms to lay down in moss. The whole business of what is called "feeding salmon with worms" is taken very seriously, and the weighting of the cast is an art in itself. But, even if successful, a little of this kind of fishing goes a long way, and one day, being bored with it, I mounted a large gold minnow and cast it far out into the stream. It was considered by the "locals" to be a dreadful crime thus to desert one of the finest worm casts on the river when conditions were perfect for it, but, much to my surprise, I soon felt a heavy pull on my line, and was not long in finding that I was in a good fish. At first he played quietly enough, and I managed to encourage him to work upstream for about one hundred and fifty yards into fairly slack water. He then tried to run up the eye of a weir, but failing in this he bolted like a shot across the stream, where he met the full force of the flood, and I had to run all I knew to keep pace with him for a full two hundred yards down the bank. In spite of all I could do, I could not prevent him from pulling me to a point where a small stream, also in flood, ran into the main river. I tried to hold him there, but he was well down-stream and in very heavy water. In a few moments a glance at my reel showed me only a yard or so of line left. Nothing for it but to go in, and the salmon literally dragged me across the mouth of the stream, in which I could only just touch the bottom in spots. After landing on the other

side, by hard running and good fencing I was able to recover a lot of line and brought the fish quite close to the bank, but he again took charge of the situation and went down the next stream at top speed, and I concluded I must really have hooked a monster. In the end, however, when I gaffed him in a backwater, he turned out to be a fish of only twenty-four pounds, but foul-hooked in the back fin. Wet to the skin, I felt that there was some sound sense in the remark: "You had a right to stick to the worms."

Whether this fish went for the minnow or not it is impossible to say, but at any rate he induced me on similar days to try a large minnow instead of the mournful worm.

In this way, on more than one occasion, I have got fish by spinning in the quieter parts of the stream—in fact in almost any part where one would not fish when the river was in good order.



Photo : B. D. Holberton

A MOORLAND STREAM

CHAPTER ELEVEN

ODD DAYS AFTER TROUT

MANY a man who takes up salmon-fishing seriously will no longer trouble to try for trout, and thus loses much of the pleasure of the gentle art. On the best of rivers there come days, all too many sometimes, when you cannot stir a salmon—days when you might as well be fishing on dry land. At any rate this has been my sad experience.

Of course, to a less extent, the same might be said about a trout stream, but it is a rare day when opportunity does not come to the trout angler some time or other. Also in spring salmon rivers are often in flood, and too coloured even for a minnow, whilst their tributaries are just right for trout-fishing.

To me there is something companionable about a trout stream which I miss beside a big river; something very restful after days spent wading up to your middle and many monotonous hours casting with a heavy rod over the swollen waters of a river. The very feel of the little trout rod comes then as a joy.

One of the advantages of salmon-fishing in Ireland is that, when sport is poor, there is nearly always a promising trout stream near at hand, to which an expedition can be made.

I know that so long as a salmon is to be caught a keen fisherman should stick to the river, and I have often been severely punished for deserting my post of duty. One particularly painful instance occurred while fishing the River Suir in Tipperary.

Two of us had been thrashing the water for three or four days, with nothing but a kelt to reward our efforts. In the end I got sick of it and made off up the Anner—a pleasant trout stream with nice clean banks. As so often happens, the luck turned on the very day that I was away and my friend got two salmon—one of thirty pounds—and lost another. Still, I remain incorrigible, and can never hold out for long against the appeal of a trout stream in spring.

In spite of the Free State Government's drastic, and generally successful, endeavours to put down poaching, now and again one comes across a river where poachers still hold sway. The Nore, in Co. Kilkenny, is one example. From time immemorial some of the dwellers beside this river have regarded the salmon in it as their legitimate prey. To call them poachers would be to insult them deeply. They maintain that they have an ancient right, dating from Queen Anne, to drag the river with nets. The river is everything to them, and their attitude towards it is well expressed in the following incident.

A young fellow wishing to emigrate to America came to me one day to ask about the life there. Before

proceeding to such minor details as the prospect of finding a job, etc., in that vast country, he asked, in a voice which betrayed the importance of the question : " Is there e'er a river in it? "

It is, therefore, not surprising that the Nore, which could be a splendid salmon river, is now only a medioc're one. Still, the poachers have suffered many reverses recently and the fishing is improving. In February or March a visit might be paid to the picturesque little village of Inistiogue with a good chance of a spring fish on the free water there, provided that the river is high enough to prevent the nets working. But the chief attractions that the Nore possesses for me are its scenery and trout-fishing.

" Drop me a line," wrote Charles Lever, in 1848, to a friend, " when you have killed and eaten a Nore trout one pound in weight. Your letter will be a song of triumph, for no fish makes a better fight for his life, and none can approach him in firmness and flavour. The lakes and muddy waters of the Midland Counties no doubt produce fish of larger size, but the rocky sofas and sandy beds of the Nore hold a vigorous race of fish, small indeed, but hard fed from the overhanging woods that line the river, into which they drop fatness."

My favourite stretch of river lies midway between Thomastown and Inistiogue. One bank is wooded to the water's edge, and on the other a few fields separate

the woods from the river, with a picturesque old ivy-clad ruin situated on rising ground in the middle. Here Bishop Berkeley was born in 1684, and amidst these peaceful surroundings he evolved much of his great works on philosophy, which were so far in advance of his time.

A cave in the woods on the opposite side of the river was, towards the middle of the eighteenth century, a favourite hiding-place of a very different character—a notorious highwayman named Freany. This man became the leader of a band of robbers and lived up to the high ideals of his profession. The way he relieved an unfortunate lady of her trinkets was said to be a lesson in deportment under somewhat trying circumstances. He robbed the rich and gave freely to the poor, and to this day his name is held in high esteem by the peasantry.

It is strange that Lever, in introducing Freany into *The Knight of Gwynne*, should show so little knowledge of his real character, which was vastly superior to the Dick Turpins and Jack Sheppards in a similar line of business on the other side of the channel at about the same period.

In order to gain inside knowledge, Freany often went as servant to some of the big houses in the neighbourhood. Needless to say, his employers had no idea of his true identity. In this way he once found himself waiting at a dinner-party at the house of the then Lord



" WHERE THE BIG TROUT LIE "—A LOUGH DERG BAY

Carrick, when he overheard one of the guests—probably well into his third bottle—bragging about the summary treatment he would mete out to Freany if he were held up by him on the road. Freany slipped out of the room, went into the garden, trimmed a cabbage stalk to represent a pistol, and hid behind some trees in the avenue. It was a moonlight night, and, as the boasting gentleman drove past, out jumped the robber, masked, and brandishing his “pistol.” The ruse was completely successful; the man who but an hour before was so brave in his cups now pleaded for his life, and was thankful to escape with the loss of his money. Report has it that when Lord Carrick heard about it he was so pleased that, when Freany was in a tight corner some time later, he secured him a job as tide-waiter, and thus saved him from the gallows.

Like most of the other big rivers in the South, the Nore has several tributary streams which are well worth trying. One of them, the King’s River, besides yielding good trout, provided me, when in spate, with the excitement of catching a five-pound grilse on a trout rod. Another, the little Arrigle, which tumbles down a rocky glen between furze-clad hills, and is full of sporting little trout, brought back memories of Dartmoor.

The next time I find myself anywhere near the upper waters of the Nore I have another expedition in mind. Years ago a friend told me about a wonderful stream which, so far as I can remember, runs somewhat near

Durrow, in Queen's County. Where it touches the fringe of the Bog of Allen it is a smooth, even-flowing stream, and in its dark, peaty depths holds magnificent trout. It is all dry-fly work, and bushes and weeds make it difficult; but when you land a trout you are amply rewarded for any previous failure. On a morning early in June, when there was a good hatch of fly on the water, my friend caught a brace, one of which turned the scale at four and a half pounds, and lost several other big fellows.

Few of us are fortunate enough to be able to spend months roaming the country at will, unhampered by cares of any sort, but I met one such lucky individual returning from a mountain lake in Connemara, with a nice basket of brown trout, a year or two ago. He told me that he was on a year's leave from India, and was spending part of it motoring and fishing in Ireland. He had already got some excellent dry-fly fishing in the Barrow, near Graigue-na-Managh, and in the Suir, not far from the old abbey at Cashel. He had toured the lesser-known parts of Kerry pretty thoroughly and was enthusiastic about the scenery and the fishing. He had spent the dapping season between Loughs Derg and Corrib, and was now making a leisurely progress through the West. So far, his fishing had cost him next to nothing, and his only difficulty had been to find decent accommodation in the wilds; but the kindly welcome he received everywhere did much to make up for this.

While on this holiday, too, I came across another sportsman, who, I believe, is a well-known Harley Street doctor. He was certainly a very resourceful angler, and one day, when I was feeling in a particularly hopeless frame of mind, he showed me a way of catching trout which was new to me.

I had wasted the whole of my last precious morning casting over a very enticing bit of water—a swirling pool underneath a waterfall, with plenty of sea-trout and a few grilse in it. Nearly every fly in my book had been tried in turn, and I had come to the end of my resources without stirring a fish. This pool seemed the only possible chance, as the day was bright and the river low. And now there was nothing for it but to take down my rod and await the car which was to bring me back to work, without even the memory of one last struggle with a sea-trout to cheer me on the road. It was at this tragic moment that the doctor came along on his way to an upper beat, and I told him all about my bad luck. “Ah,” said he, “let me have a try. I bet you I’ll get a rise out of one of them.” He then climbed out on to a rock immediately overhanging the fall, and letting down a fly on a short line he kept it bobbing up and down on the surface of the angry waters below. It looked exactly as if some insect had suddenly fallen from the sky and continued its dance of death over the seething cauldron. After a few seconds a sea-trout literally jumped out of the foam at the fly, missed

it, and then took it with a swirl as it was lowered again.

Between us we landed two more sea-trout and lost a grilse, and then I had to go. The fly was a sort of "Cock-y-bondhu," only more fuzzy and with more hackle. He called it a "Buzz-fuzz"—a very good name for it. Unfortunately I have not had another opportunity to try my hand at this game, but, on a sunny day, in a suitable place, when the river is low, it evidently has possibilities.

I suppose there is a bit of the poacher in most Irish people, and all my life I have been somewhat attracted by the less reputable paths of angling—tricks at which, I am afraid, correct anglers would hold up their hands in horror. As a boy, I used to climb out on to an old branch overhanging the river, from which I could watch the trout below enjoying the shade on a hot summer day. I spent many hours trying to tempt one particularly big fellow with every conceivable kind of bait—such as blue-bottles, grasshoppers, ants' eggs, beetles and water-spiders; at considerable risk I even raided a wasp's nest for the grubs, but all to no purpose. At last I got the trout to take an oak-fly, but, in the subsequent struggle, I toppled off the branch into the river, broke the top of my rod, and lost him.

At one house where I spent the summer holidays the river ran right under the kitchen windows, and there were always several nice trout lying in a pool below.

When the cook threw any refuse out of the window, these trout used to swim up to investigate. They were not at all fastidious, but I noticed that they were particularly fond of scraps of bacon. Baiting a hook, one day, with a nice piece of bacon-fat, I let it down as near as possible to them, but, instead of rushing up to it, they became suspicious and swam slowly away, scornfully contemptuous of my clumsy efforts. I then enlisted the services of the cook and got her to throw out some cabbage leaves, potato peelings, and the like rubbish, into the river at the same time as I lowered my tit-bit, and this ruse was completely successful. All the trout came up again as usual, and the biggest one of the lot seized my bait. I played it for some time out of the kitchen window, to the great interest of the cook and kitchenmaid. Eventually a message was sent to the coachman, who came to my assistance with a boat, and landed the trout for me. It weighed nearly two pounds, and was eaten with great gusto by the family, who were not enlightened as to how and where it had been caught.

I have always treasured a wish to become a member of that pleasant little club "The Flyfishers," but if this book ever comes to the notice of the Committee I doubt if they will elect me. These tricks—not to speak of catching salmon with a worm—put me outside the pale. At any rate, even if I remain incorrigible, I have confessed to my enormities. Besides, I have heard of

one member of "The Flyfishers" who—— But perhaps it would be better to leave it at that. He is now a dry-fly purist, and a great performer on the chalk streams of old England. He is, too, an advocate of some of the latest fads, including barbless hooks—of which my only experience has been some rather unsatisfactory experiments, carried out at an early age, with a bent pin and a worm.

During the recent troubles in Ireland, fishing was one of the few recreations left to us, and often helped to take one's mind off the discomforts of life. Travelling at that time was rather in the nature of a lottery. You never knew when you would reach your destination, if at all. The journey might begin well enough in a train and, with luck, end, days later, in a Ford car. One way or the other, you saw a great deal of the country, and occasionally, too, got an opportunity of testing its fishing possibilities.

Once the train in which I was travelling stopped for an interminable time at a small wayside station. To all my questions as to when our leisurely progress might be resumed I could get only one answer: "She will have to wait for 'the goods.' " It was a single line, and apparently we were due to pass a goods train at this station. The line had been damaged that morning, and no one knew when it would be repaired sufficiently to enable "the goods" to get through. Except myself, all concerned were perfectly happy, with that supreme



" EXPERIMENTS WITH A BENT PIN AND A WORM "

contempt for time which is a feature of the Irish character. The few passengers got out of the uncomfortable thirds and settled down in a first-class carriage to a game of cards with the guard. The stationmaster, in uniform plus a bowler hat, resumed his interrupted task of digging potatoes. The engine-driver disappeared in the direction of a near-by pub. In short, the train had every appearance of remaining there all day.

Going for a stroll up the line, I noticed a jolly little brook running down a valley. The porter, whom I found smoking a pipe and reading a week-old *Independent*, assured me that "there were grand trout in it." Fortunately I had a rod with me and was soon at work. In the first few casts I hooked and lost a trout well over a pound, and was so excited thereby that I, too, became regardless of time. I fished up the valley, following the twists of the stream, till soon the station was lost to sight. In a couple of hours or so I had a dozen nice trout, and then I thought it would be better to return. In Ireland it is the unexpected that always happens, and even the goods train might have turned up in my absence. I met the stationmaster coming from his potatoes, but already I knew the worst. There was the goods train busily shunting waggons down a siding, to the ruin of a promising meadow which had grown up between the rails. My train had gone on, also my luggage, and there was not another to my destination that day. The local inn

could hardly be described as the acme of comfort, but at any rate I had "noted for future reference" a very promising trout stream.

Another leisurely journey across the country gave me the opportunity of a pilgrimage to Spenser's Mulla, the Awbeg, in Co. Cork, which is a first-rate trout stream, with much charming dry-fly water. Not far from Buttevant is the site of Spenser's Irish home, Kilcolman Castle, which was granted to him, with about 3000 acres of land, in recognition of his services as Secretary to the Council of Munster.

Much of the scenery has little of the wildness which characterizes so many parts of Ireland, but around where the Awbeg joins the Blackwater it is very lovely in its own peaceful way, with rich pasture and woods in a background of soft hills.

Here Spenser wrote most of *The Faerie Queene*, which he describes in a verse addressed to Lord Grey de Wilton as :

"Rude rymes the which a rustick Muse did weave
In savadge soyle."

His friend Sir Walter Raleigh, being out of favour at Court, was then at Myrtle Grove, Youghal. The house is but little altered from the time when Raleigh lived there. In the little garden where the first potatoes in Ireland were grown there are still the two old yew-trees under which the friends so often sat. But it was

while staying at Kilcolman in the summer of 1589 that Spenser first read to Raleigh part of *The Faerie Queene*. Sir Walter was quick to see its beauty, for Spenser tells us that :

“ And when he heard the musick that I made,
He found himselfe full greatlie pleas'd at it.”

Not long afterwards Elizabeth's displeasure subsided somewhat and Raleigh returned to Court, bringing the poet with him.

Spenser's *Colin Clouts come home againe* is dedicated to Raleigh “from my house of Kilcolman, the 27. of December. 1591.”

In this poem Colin's Song to the Shepherds begins :

“ One day (quoth he), I sat, (as was my trade)
Under the foot of Mole, that mountaine hore,
Keeping my sheepe amongst the cooly shade
Of the greene alders by the Mullaes shore.”

Spenser suffered the fate of many an Irish landlord in recent times. His castle was set on fire by rebels in 1598. He and his wife escaped but his little child was burnt, and probably much of his unpublished work as well. It must be admitted that in Spenser's case there was some justification for the outrage, for the plans which he set out in his *View of the State of Ireland*, for the subjugation of the country, were of great severity.

He was very fond of Kilcolman, and found abundant inspiration in the beauty of its surroundings.

It is hard to leave Spenser, and perhaps I may be forgiven one last quotation from his works, for it shows that the Awbeg, in spite of the presence of pike, was a good trout stream in his day too :

“ Ye nymphes of Mulla, which with carefull heed
The silver scaly trouts do tend full well,
And greedy pikes which use therein to feed ;
(Those trouts and pikes all others doo excell).”



Photo : Poole, Waterford.

THE DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE FISHING NEAR CARENSVILLE, R. BLACKWATER.

APPENDIX

CHAPTER TWELVE

FISHING IN THE IRISH FREE STATE

SOUTHERN IRELAND is a country of swift changes, a country about which it is never safe to prophesy. A few years ago the outlook for fishing was black indeed, for the poaching fraternity took advantage of the general lawlessness to launch a campaign on a scale hitherto undreamt of. Salmon were netted, gaffed, speared in the spawning season, and poisoned. Even dynamite was resorted to on some rivers, and all sizeable trout were taken out of many of the streams and lakes. Small wonder, then, that the general opinion among anglers was that it would be many a long year before their favourite waters would be worth fishing again.

With the signing of the Treaty, however, and the gradual restoration of law and order throughout the country, there came a remarkable change for the better. The Ministry of Fisheries, although handicapped by lack of funds, got to work without delay to check the wholesale poaching, and in this task they are being ably assisted by the Civic Guard — the new Police Force of the country. The individual problems which each

district presents are being studied, and the question of over-netting—that bane of many an Irish river—is under consideration. Local Boards of Conservators are once more functioning, and water-bailiffs are increasing in numbers and efficiency. Best of all, there is gradually spreading throughout the land what one of the Irish ministers calls “a decent sense of citizenship.” So far as fishing is concerned, one of the results of this is the number of local angling associations which are springing up all over the country. The members of these associations are just as keen sportsmen, and just as jealous of their rights, as members of similar clubs in England.

Formerly, if a salmon were seen in a river, the general opinion was that it should be got out by fair means or foul—more often the latter. Now many of the people realize what a valuable asset fishing is to themselves and to their country. Angling associations frequently rent waters, appoint keepers to look after them, interest themselves in the river generally, and in some places even establish salmon and trout hatcheries. Already their good work is bearing fruit on the Westmeath lakes, which are again showing good sport—especially in the May-fly season—after being practically worthless; on the River Lee, in Co. Cork, for which the Cork Salmon Anglers’ Association has worked hard, and on many rivers and lakes throughout the country.

The reports from most of the fishing centres of the 1927 season were most encouraging. The spring salmon-fishing on the rivers Suir, Lee and Blackwater was particularly good; salmon-fishing on the Shannon was above the average; Kerry waters gave fine sport, and only dry weather interfered with the salmon and sea-trout fishing in the West. Of course, much remains to be done, and unfortunately, in Ireland, poachers, like the poor, will always be with us. The future, however, is now at least as hopeful as it was formerly depressing.

The days when good salmon or sea-trout fishing could be got for next to nothing are over. It is now both expensive and difficult to find, and the number of fishermen visiting the country is increasing yearly. Yet I think the average rents are still considerably below those prevailing in Great Britain.

Brown-trout fishing is free in most parts of the country, or can be had for the asking. For a keen angler, with time and a motor at his disposal, the possibilities here are endless.

Except for occasional notices in the Press of record pike of forty pounds and over, caught in Lough Derg or some other lake, one hears very little about coarse fishing in Ireland. The truth is that few bother their heads about it, which is a pity, for it is very good indeed. Take Lough Corrib, as one example among many. This lake is known to hold monster pike, as well as perch, rudd and bream. In the autumn and winter,

fishing could be combined with fair wild-fowling. There are many angling clubs in England whose members are keen coarse fishermen, and I hope that some of them may be induced to visit Ireland during the winter months—their experiences would be bound to be interesting. We might, for instance, at last get an authentic record of a pike which for size and ferocity eclipses all our fables. There is a story of a 93 lb. monster being found on the bank of the Shannon, which had choked itself in an effort to swallow a 15 lb. salmon. But, so far as I know, the record pike caught on a rod in recent years is a 53 lb. specimen from Lake Conn.

Those who like pike-fishing will be well advised to spend a few days on Lough Nafuoey, Co. Mayo, which can be reached easily from Leenane by motor. This lake is absolutely full of pike, which seem to have consumed all the other fish in it, with the exception of a few big trout, and are now starting in on each other. One autumn, when salmon-fishing without much success in this neighbourhood, I took a day off and had a most exciting time trolling in the lake. Unfortunately I lost in the weeds a very big fellow, which, on being hooked, rose out of the water shaking its grotesque head, and snapping its wicked jaws in the approved pike fashion. Otherwise most of my pike-fishing has been most unwillingly done, while prawning for salmon in the Lee and other rivers. The prawn seems an irresistible bait for them.

I envy the man who could spend the whole fishing season touring Ireland equipped with a Ford car, a collapsible boat and a philosophic mind. He would certainly have wonderful sport. There are in Clare and the West of Ireland many lakes, with no boats on them, teeming with trout which have seldom or never seen an artificial fly.

One of the drawbacks in the wilds is the difficulty of finding comfortable accommodation. The cosy inn beloved of anglers is rare indeed in Ireland. Fishermen are simple folk, seldom exacting in their needs, but they do demand comfort and cleanliness. Most of them will agree with the writer that it is infinitely preferable to sit down to the homely scrambled eggs, scones and tea in an inn-parlour than to try to wade through a table d'hôte dinner not a single course of which is eatable, in marble halls. It must, however, in justice be admitted that the hotels are improving yearly, and that their charges are coming down.

Occasionally it is possible to get accommodation in private houses, and lodges with fishing are often advertised. It is very advisable, however, to make careful inquiries before taking a fishing, for, when sporting amenities are in question, free rein is sometimes given to the national talent for imaginative description.

Unfortunately I have not the knowledge to make an exhaustive survey of the fishing in the Irish Free State. Many good districts I have not as yet had time to visit,

and others are only lightly touched upon, but such information as is given in the following notes is largely based on personal experience, or that of friends, and so may serve as a rough guide.

In Co. Cork there are two good early-salmon rivers—the Lee and the Blackwater. February, March, April and May are the best months. On the Lee a good beat could probably be had at a yearly rental of about £100, and, with a season anything like those of recent years, should yield a rod fifty to sixty salmon. Fishings are also let by the month, at rents varying from £15 to £75. Day tickets, costing £1, can be had on good water, and in March or April, if the river is in good order, are worth it.

If you have a motor, the Hydro., St Ann's Hill, Cork, is a comfortable headquarters to fish the lower part of the Lee. The upper beats, which are not much good before March, are best reached from Macroom, and "Williams's" hotel there has some very good fishing, especially in high water. The Lee is a poor trout river, but several of its tributaries are good.

The Blackwater is a much more expensive river, but the fishing, as a whole, is better, and the salmon run larger. The celebrated Careysville Fishing, for example, which is let for about £500 a month during the spring, yielded from February to June 1927 over 1600 salmon. The "Devonshire Arms" hotel, at Lismore, has now been reopened, and there are several lodges, with fish-

ing, to be let. On the upper reaches above Fermoy the fishing begins to get good about 1st March, and water can be rented more reasonably.

On the Blackwater, and some other good rivers in the South, the poor man sometimes gets his chance when the best of the spring fishing is over. A friend of mine got quite a good little beat on the Blackwater, near Mallow, a year or two ago, for the month of June, for £15. During June and the beginning of July there is often a good run of grilse on these Southern rivers, although for the past few seasons this has been very disappointing.

Trout-fishing on the upper reaches of the Blackwater, and on several of its tributaries, is good, and there is also free sea-trout and brown-trout fishing to be got about Lismore during July, August and September.

The Bandon river, Co. Cork, is now much better preserved, but still suffers a lot from poaching. There is some free salmon-fishing, and beats can also be rented on the preserved parts of the river at from £10 to £15 a month. During the past spring season the river gave very fair sport. In the tidal waters below Inishannon there is free sea-trout and brown-trout fishing, which is not bad during the summer months.

The Ilan river, near Skibbereen, is nearly all free, and there is a sporting chance of salmon and sea-trout after a flood from May onwards.

There are several delightful little rivers in the wild district between Bantry and Kenmare, which are well

worth exploring by anyone who is prepared to rough it a bit. Salmon and sea-trout run up most of them, but of course only during a spate.

In spite of poaching and over-netting in tidal waters, one of the best early-salmon rivers in the South of Ireland is the Suir, from February to May. Unfortunately only a comparatively short stretch of the river between Clonmel and Cahir is any good for salmon-fishing, and most of the best water is in private hands. Good beats, however, are sometimes let for the season at from £200 to £350, or for a shorter period in proportion, and are well worth taking. Sometimes there is some fishing available around Clonmel, and the Clonmel Anglers' Club is helpful to strangers. One of the advantages of the Suir is that there are very good trout in it, especially in the upper reaches; this makes it very pleasant in the summer months, when salmon-fishing is not much use.

The River Slaney, in Co. Wexford, is a sporting spring river for medium-sized salmon, with little or no wading necessary. Most of the fishing is in private hands, but some good beats are let by the season. The hotel at Ferns has some good water for its guests.

On the River Nore in Co. Kilkenny, and the Barrow in Co. Carlow, there is a good deal of free salmon-fishing, but these rivers, although improving every year, have been spoilt by poaching. In the early part of the season, however, when the water is too high for netting, there



33-lbs. fish,
Feb. 21, 1928.

During February, 1928, Lord Teignmouth, the angler shown in the above photographs, caught some very heavy



Playing 19-lb. fish with a broken rod
March 6, 1928

salmon in the Nore, including one of 45-lbs.

is a sporting chance of a forty-pounder, and later on there is some good dry-fly fishing for heavy trout to be got in the Barrow.

Salmon-fishing starts in Kerry in January, but it is not up to much. The best chance is on the lakes at Waterville—a cold business in a boat at this time of the year. Waterville from about the middle of May to the end of August is quite another matter, for then you have sea-trout fishing as well as the chance of a salmon. The scenery is charming, there are two good hotels, and the only drawback is that the place is apt to be too popular, but then there are always brown-trout lakes to fall back on.

Kenmare is not at all a bad place if you have a motor. There is a good deal of free fishing in the neighbourhood, and a very good hotel controlled by the railway.

The Roughty river, near Kenmare, in spite of occasional poisoning, is quite good for salmon and sea-trout from July to September, after heavy rains, and is mostly free.

Cloonee Lakes, about six miles from Kenmare, are well worth visiting for scenery and trout-fishing, which is preserved. Permission to fish there can be obtained, however, from Lord Lansdowne's agent at Kenmare. The trout are small, averaging about six to eight ounces, but a basket of three to five dozen is not uncommon.

There is a nice little hotel at Kilgarvan, about seven miles from Kenmare, and a sporting chance in wet weather of salmon in the little river there, which is

free. There are also three or four lakes in the district holding good brown trout.

In the tidal waters of the Laune river, near Killorglin, Co. Kerry, the sea and brown trout-fishing is sometimes good. From Killorglin to the mouth of Killarney Lake there is fair salmon-fishing in the Laune, parts of which are free. There is a comfortable hotel at Carragh, and the lake there yields brown trout, occasional salmon and, in the autumn, sea-trout. Glencar and Glenbeigh are well-known fishing centres in Kerry, and the former, especially, is a very delightful place to stay at.

Adare, Co. Limerick, has a very comfortable hotel, which issues tickets at £1 per day for salmon-fishing on a good stretch of the preserved part of the River Maigue, where some wonderful fishing was enjoyed last spring. One of the chief attractions, to my mind, at Adare is the trout-fishing, which costs only 5s. per day, and is really good. Parts of the Maigue are free. The Camogue, and one or two other tributaries, hold big trout as well as grilse in June.

The Shannon Scheme has not yet interfered with the fishing in this river, but I am afraid that it is bound to affect it very seriously in the near future.

That beautiful stretch of tumbling water between Doonass and Castleconnell, beloved of anglers and cots-men, will never be the same again, for a huge ditch is being constructed behind Doonass and a dam near O'Brien's Bridge, above Castleconnell. This will have

the effect of diverting at least half the stream, and will mean, too, that the splendid fishing in the rapids below Killaloe is doomed.

I am told that the engineers, with Teutonic thoroughness, are devising lifts to enable the salmon to ascend the river as before, but whether these somewhat conservative fish will condescend to use them is another question.

The 1927 season gave good sport in the hotel waters at Castleconnell, and some very heavy fish were caught. It is all boat work, and bait-fishing is the most paying method in the early part of the year.

Killaloe and Mount Shannon are other good centres for salmon-fishing on the Shannon, and also for dapping on Lough Derg.

Perhaps the best headquarters for the dapping season on Lough Derg is Dromineer, where the accommodation is comfortable, if a trifle on the rough side.

A friend who stayed there last season gives me the following notes on the fishing :

“The May-fly usually rises on Lough Derg between the 12th and 20th May—a mild spring brings it out earlier than a cold one. The fishing lasts about three weeks, but if the weather is very hot the hatch is over sooner. There is something about the fishing that brings one back year after year, partly, perhaps, the charm of the lake, but chiefly the hope that some day one may catch the trout of one’s dreams. They are there, these

big fellows of 20 lb. and over, but the difficulty is to find them on the feed.

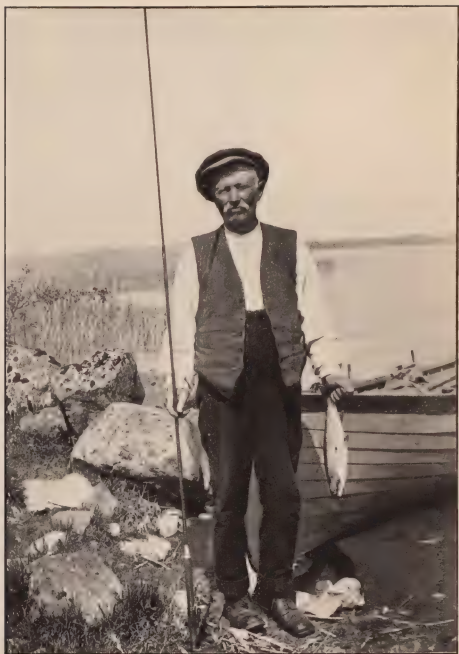
“My best so far has been a beauty of 6½ lb.

“Dapping is, of course, the usual form of fishing. This entails a long rod, a light line, a short cast, and generally two natural May-flies on a single hook.

“Personally, I find dapping apt to be monotonous after a time and recently have varied it by using a dry fly. The winged May-flies are not nearly so killing as the hackled variety, and the hackled spent gnat is better too. If there is a breeze I try to find a sheltered corner; if not, I put up two dry flies and fish the water as the boat drifts along. Here is a typical day extracted from my diary: ‘May 28th. Blowing very hard this morning, verging on a gale. During the afternoon the wind moderated sufficiently to row across the lake to where a wood gave me some shelter. In the calm water a few trout were rising; I caught three, one slightly over 3 lb., the others about 2 lb. each. I lost several, also my cast and fly, through striking too hard.’

“A good breeze and a wet day are best for dapping, as the May-fly stays on the water, but blazing hot calm days are what I have been hoping for ever since I started dry-fly work. Unfortunately, these late years spring has been a time of cold winds and sunless days.

“During the afternoon and evening of a fine day without wind, the gnats come out in swarms to lay their eggs, and lie about on the top of the water dead or dying. Then



A LOUGH DERG BOATMAN

the rise of trout really starts properly. One can see big fellows with their back fins over the water gobbling up the flies as fast as they can. The difficulty is to put the dry fly in the right place, as the trout are here, there and everywhere, chasing their victims. When a big trout is seen to be near the shore of the lake it is easy enough, as, sooner or later, it will return to the same place. So if you put your fly out and wait patiently it is generally possible to get a rise. It is curious, though, how often it happens that, just as a trout takes it into its head to go for your fly, something occurs to distract your attention—it may be a snipe drumming overhead; perhaps you are lighting your pipe or contemplating the scenery—whatever the reason, the result is always the same. When the situation is realized you strike too late, and away goes the trout.

“This fishing has a charm of its own, and I get far more excitement out of it than from even good salmon-fishing.”

Outboard motors, which can be hired in the neighbourhood, are now fitted to some of the boats on Lough Derg. Although their popping disturbs the peace of the lake they are very useful in enabling distant bays, which are seldom fished, to be visited.

Very occasionally big trout and salmon are caught trolling on Lough Derg. Last season a salmon was lost on the dry fly and a grilse caught on the dap. But, generally speaking, except for coarse fishing, there is

very little sport for the angler before or after the dapping season.

There is a little river near Dromineer, the Nenagh, I think, which is sometimes quite good for grilse in June.

The fishing on Lough Corrib has greatly improved of recent years, thanks to the Corrib Fishermen's Association, and now it is probably the best, and certainly the most varied, free fishing in Ireland. There is a nice little hotel at Oughterard—Sweeney's—and this is a convenient place from which to fish this lake.

The May-fly season is usually about a week later than on Lough Derg, and, although the average weight of trout is slightly lower, the fishing is better.

One great advantage is that there is generally something to do: wet-fly fishing and trolling for salmon and trout from April until the May-fly season begins. After that there is a good run of grilse and sea-trout at the Galway end of the lake, and from July till the season ends, in October, dapping with the Daddy and Grasshopper for trout can be varied with wet-fly fishing and trolling.

The coarse fishing has already been mentioned, and about this—and indeed all that pertains to the sport on Corrib and district, which contains some good trout streams—the manager of the hotel and the secretary of the Fishermen's Association are most helpful.

On both Loughs Derg and Corrib the charge for a boat is 10s. per day. This is surely not excessive for a boat which is comfortable, and a man to row it who



Photo : J. Kershaw

REDSHANK AND NEWLY-HATCHED CHICKS

is as keen as yourself. Many of the Derg and Corrib boatmen are very skilful in manœuvring their boats into position for casting over a rising fish. This is most important, for any clumsiness or ripples on the water may put a big trout down for the day.

Lough Mask can also be fished from Oughterard. On this lake the May-fly rises later than on Corrib, and at other times trout, averaging about three-quarters of a pound, occasionally rise freely to the wet fly.

A great attraction about these Irish lakes in spring is the number of interesting birds which nest round their shores, such as the Tufted Duck (common), Pintail and Shoveler (rare), Red-breasted Merganser, Red-throated Diver, Great Crested Grebe, Dotterel (rare), Ringed Plover, Redshank (both very common), Black-headed Gull, Common Tern, and many others.

When the May-fly carnival is in full swing, small birds for miles round flock to the shores of the lake to join in the feast. You may see on any island tits, wagtails, chaffinches, buntings, whinchats and wrens so gorged that they can hardly move, and with the legs of the last fly that they have tried to swallow sticking out between their bills.

During the summer months the wild West, with its countless rivers and lakes, is the place to make for.

If you have only a limited time at your disposal, and want to make reasonably certain of catching a salmon, you should visit the town of Galway in July. At this

time of the year a permit to fish costs £1 for the day, and it will be hard luck if you do not achieve your ambition. A friend caught six one afternoon, and this was in September. The salmon lie packed below the weir waiting to get up to Lough Corrib. They will sometimes take a fly, but a prawn is deadly. Such fishing, carried out as it is in the vicinity of the town, is not very inspiring, but once in a way it is an interesting experience after the many blank days in a salmon-fisher's life.

I must confess that my first visit to Connemara was rather in the nature of a disappointment. It is true that there is a wealth of salmon and sea-trout fishing in the district, but it is nearly all in private hands, and the stray visitor finds it both hard and expensive to get.

An English angler told me a sad story of a day on Lough Inagh—one of the best lakes in Connemara. The fishing cost him £1. There were two boatmen to pay, which, with their lunch and whisky, ran him into another, and then he had to hire a motor to get there and back. One way or the other it was an expensive outing. The day was absolutely calm, without a ripple on the lake—and he got one miserable sea-trout. If he had struck Inagh when the breeze was favourable his story might have been very different. He might easily have had a dozen or more sea-trout, and a salmon or two as well. The trouble is that at the height of the season, on good water, you have to book your rod days beforehand, and

so cannot pick your weather. Of course you might have a similar experience fishing in Scotland, but somehow or other in Ireland you resent it.

Brown-trout fishing is free on many of the Connemara lakes, but, in my opinion, it is not nearly as good as in Donegal, and, as a rule, the trout run no larger.

In the old days Ballynahinch, with its splendid fishing, was a great attraction. Now the railway hotel at Recess has been burnt, and the fishing is let for a long period of years.

During part of the 1927 season at Ballynahinch, rods were let by the day on some of the lakes and rivers at a charge of £2, and 8s. extra for the gillie. This seems rather a lot to pay for such a chancy business as salmon and sea-trout fishing in this part of the world, even on good waters.

At Leenane, Killary Bay, there is a comfortable hotel, and salmon and sea-trout fishing on the Kylemore lakes and elsewhere, at rates varying from £1 to 10s. a day, can be reached with a motor. The Erriff, which runs down to the sea at the head of Killary Bay, is a fine salmon and sea-trout river, and although it is usually let by the season, day tickets, costing £1, can often be had on some of the beats, which vary a good deal. The lower beats are usually the best, as the upper part of the river consists principally of deep, peaty pools, with little or no current in them, and useless unless there is a favourable breeze.

The hotel at Cashel leases good sea-trout fishing for its guests, and I think the charge is 15s. per day, gillie included. This hotel also has some salmon-fishing, for which £1 per day is charged.

There are several good sea-trout lakes around Carna, which can be fished free by visitors staying at the hotel there, and excellent sea-fishing. It is not often that one hears of a lodge in Connemara to be let moderately, with good fishing. Screebe Lodge, and several others, have wonderful sea-trout fisheries, but these, if they come into the market at all, are usually quite beyond the reach of most of us.

For the whole of Connemara, and indeed for this part of Ireland generally, the middle of June to the end of July is perhaps the best time; but it must be borne in mind that the fishing is dependent on frequent rain. After a short spell of dry weather the little rivers become mere trickles, and even the fish in the lakes become sulky. It is popularly supposed to be always raining in this part of the world, but I spent three weeks there one summer without one good downfall the whole time.

Achill Island has magnificent cliff scenery, especially in bad weather, when the Atlantic rollers are breaking in, but the fishing is confined to a few loughs holding brown trout, and very occasionally sea-trout. The sea-fishing round the coast is very good.

Mayo has wonderful fishing of much the same

FISHING IN THE IRISH FREE STATE 199

character as Connemara, but, as a rule, it is not so expensive. The Ministry of Fisheries, Dublin, which publishes an excellent general guide to the fishing in the Irish Free State, has several lodges, with fishing, to be let in Mayo, as also has the Marquis of Sligo, whose agent at Westport can give particulars. Mr R. G. Brown, auctioneer, Westport, usually has the letting of some very good salmon-fishing in the Owenduff river, near Ballycroy. During the 1927 season the inclusive terms for fishing, accommodation, etc., were £10 per week for each rod (limited to four), and a friend of mine who went there told me it was well worth it.

At Westport, where there is a railway hotel, the fishing in the river and lakes in the vicinity is free. Salmon-fishing is sometimes fairly good, and brown trout run up to between six and seven pounds. The Newport river and Beltra Lake, which can be fished from Newport, are stocked yearly, and the lake especially is good for salmon. The charges are 5s. per day on the river and 10s. on the lake, with an extra 10s. for boat and man. The estuary of the river is good for sea-trout after a flood. In both Loughs Conn and Cullen there is a good chance of salmon, as numbers of fish get up into these lakes from the River Moy, which is a splendid river, but nearly all preserved. Pontoon, where there is a hotel, is a convenient centre.

The Ballysodare is the principal river in Co. Sligo, and the fishing is usually let by the season. Lough

Gill is worth seeing for its beauty, but the fishing is only moderate. Lough Arrow, another Sligo lake, is good for big trout during the May-fly season, which is later than on most other Irish lakes.

In Co. Donegal the Erne is a splendid late-salmon river, and Ballyshannon is a good centre to fish it from towards the end of June and July.

Rods at this time of year cost £1 per day and are limited in number. As this river runs out of Lough Erne, it is rarely too low for salmon-fishing. On the tidal waters the trout-fishing is good.

The Owenea, which empties into Loughros-more Bay, is as sporting a river as one could wish to fish, and can be all covered from the bank with a thirteen-foot rod. May, June, and July are the best months, and, as it is a very short river, constant rain is wanted to keep it in order. The Ministry of Fisheries has taken over this river, and usually lets it by the season, but there is a small portion of the upper water, near Glenties, for which tickets can be obtained at 5s. per day. At both Glenties and Adara there are good hotels, and many lakes which hold small brown trout. Indeed, throughout Donegal the trout are small, but they make up for it in numbers. Little lakes are dotted everywhere, but few have boats on them.

From July till the end of season, in October, Dungloe is an excellent sea-trout place, with a good hotel and moderate charges. There are three sea-trout lakes in

the neighbourhood, and any amount of brown-trout ones. Plenty of water is essential to enable the trout to run up the little river to the lakes.

On Lough Fern, which can be reached from Milford, the salmon-fishing in May, June and July is often good, and is free.

The River Lennon, which runs out of the lake from the opposite end to Milford, is an early-salmon river, but in places a breeze is necessary for success. The Rath Melton fishing on this river—which is usually let at a high figure—has one of the best salmon casts in Ireland below the weir.

Gweedore and Rosapenna are other good fishing centres in Donegal. At the former the spring salmon-fishing on the Clady is especially good; the only trouble is that they are both very popular resorts with anglers.

If the time which can be devoted to a fishing holiday in Ireland is short, you are limited to places which are fairly accessible—such as Waterville, Galway or Rosapenna — but for a lengthy holiday a motor is indispensable.

Much of the good fishing is in out-of-the-way parts, far from hotels, and conveniently reached only by motor. To hire a car continually is an expensive and often an inconvenient business. I can never forget having to leave a Connemara lake just as things were getting interesting because the hired Ford car could

not come for me at any other time. Personally, with three months or more of fishing in front of me, I should buy with discretion a second-hand Ford in the country and sell it at the end of my visit for what it would fetch. Even if unsaleable, the loss would not be incalculable—but then it is hardly necessary to explain that I am not a motorist !

I do not know anything about the latest model Ford, which I am told is so changed that one would hardly recognize it as an old friend, but the Ford of my delight had three essentials for touring in the wilds—a good road clearance, a good lock, and spare parts were available and easily fitted at any small town.

It has often struck me that perhaps the most ideal way of exploring the little-known corners of the Irish Free State in search of fishing or beauty would be a comfortable motor-caravan.

To bring a car over from England is neither difficult nor very expensive. The Automobile Association would advise about the various Customs formalities and the Royal Irish Automobile Club is most helpful on the Irish side.

Roads in the Irish Free State are improving every year, and some of the main ones are now first-class.

The absence of traffic on Irish roads is a great relief after England, but it is well to bear in mind that if one does meet anything on a lonely road it is often a Ford car going hell-for-leather on the wrong side of it, or an

ass-cart—the driver of which is asleep—occupying the middle.

Even if the opportunity never comes, it is interesting to plan out roughly a leisurely fishing tour in the country, avoiding anything in the nature of a cut-and-dried programme, which is a sad mistake often made even by those fortunate people for whom time is of no account.

On a fishing holiday — indeed on any kind — one should be guided by the old Oriental proverb: "Haste is of the Devil and tardiness from the All-Merciful."

Suppose, for example, you bring your car from Fishguard to Rosslare, or direct to Waterford by the comfortable Great Western route, in February or March. First of all, you might have a look at the rivers Suir, Barrow or Nore, proceeding to Co. Cork via Lismore and the valley of the Blackwater, and to Kerry via Glengariff and Kenmare. Then on to the Shannon and Lough Derg for the dapping season, afterwards moving slowly up to Connemara via Galway and Oughterard for Lough Corrib.

Crossing Mayo and Sligo, the late summer and autumn could be spent in the Donegal highlands, returning through the midlands to embark again from Dublin, either for Holyhead by the London, Midland & Scottish Railway Company's steamers, or for Liverpool, by the excellent boats of the British & Irish Steam Packet Company. Both these companies

are courtesy itself, and very helpful to anyone who wishes to visit Ireland.

By the way, while at Dublin, it might be mentioned that the Liffey is becoming quite a good salmon river. The pollution in the lower reaches which prevented the fish getting up has now been successfully dealt with. This gives one hope that the Thames, too, may in time be restored to its former glory as a salmon river.

I have spent some pleasant days motoring in the Wicklow hills, for the scenery is charming, but the fishing is only moderate, and the trout are usually very small.

So far as fishing tackle is concerned, the difficulty is often not what to bring, but what to leave behind. As a race, we anglers are rather apt to overburden ourselves with gear. In Ireland, however, the fishing is so varied that it necessitates every kind of rod and tackle. To give a list would be both tedious and unnecessary, for any good dealer can advise as to the essentials; but it may be useful to note here a few salmon- and trout-flies which are particularly good on Irish waters :

Salmon-Flies.—Jock Scott, Silver Doctor, Black Doctor, Lee Blue, Blue Charm (especially good on the Slaney), Black Goldfinch, Thunder and Lightning, Black and Yellow, Fiery Brown, and Orange Grouse. In the West of Ireland, small sizes, from No. 5 to No. 8, are best.

Sea-Trout-Flies and Lake-Flies.—Orange Grouse, Claret and Jay, Soldier Palmer, Claret and Grouse, Olive and Jay, Connemara Black, Zulu, and Butcher. Also small salmon-flies from patterns mentioned in the list.

Trout-Flies (wet and dry).—Orange Grouse, Wickham's Fancy, Greenwell's Glory, Ginger Quill, Red Quill, Dark Olive Quill, Hansen and Gold, Black Gnat, Blue Dun, Blue Black, Cairn's Fancy, March Brown, Hare's Ear, Rails, Wrens (Orange, Green, Brown), and Spiders.

This list errs on the generous side. I have tried not to leave out any important fly—besides, looking over a well-filled fly-book, whilst enjoying a pipe on the bank, is one of the many harmless pleasures of angling.

Perhaps the best all-round fly for Irish waters is the Orange Grouse. Good fishermen like a blue hackle under the grouse hackle. Whether the fly kills better dressed like this I do not know, but it seems to give confidence—which means a lot in fishing.

As regards bait-fishing, the stone loach, locally known as a "Colley," is a good bait on many Southern rivers in early spring, the eel-tail and, of course, minnows of all kinds. Later on, when the water gets low, a small prawn or shrimp, freshly caught and boiled, and fished on light tackle, is a very deadly bait. In many of the

small rivers of the West a fly-rod is quite good enough for this sort of work.

There is often a great difficulty in getting fresh prawns, which make such a difference to one's sport, and it may be useful to mention that, when fishing Southern rivers, I generally arrange with Messrs Robert Day, Hardy's agent in Cork, or Mr Carroll, Railway Terrace, Bantry, to post a regular supply. In the West, prawns or shrimps can sometimes be procured locally, but, if not, I am sure Mr John Lydon, Corrib View, Galway, would post supplies.

It would be hard to find a country where the soil is so infested with worms as that of Ireland. These animals must be washed down the rivers continually, and this doubtless explains the extreme partiality of Irish salmon for them. But I am drifting perilously near the age-long controversy as to whether salmon feed in fresh water or not, which will never do. Besides, already quite enough has been written in this book about fishing with worms.

The cost of a licence for salmon and sea-trout fishing in the Irish Free State is now increased to £2. In addition, a charge of 10s. is made for each new district fished in. This seems rather excessive, especially for visitors over on a short holiday. On a few rivers I believe it is possible to obtain a licence for fourteen days for £1.

Rod-fishing alone never appreciably affects the number



Photo : B. D. Holberton

UPPER LAKE—KYLEMORE, CONNEMARA

of salmon in a good river, but nets and weirs should be taxed heavily and strictly limited.

Good sea-fishing is obtainable at many other places round the coast in addition to those already mentioned. Ballycotton, Co. Cork, is famous. Two other small places that might be included are Dunmore East, Co. Waterford, and Kilmore Quay, Co. Wexford.

On the Saltee Islands, near the latter, there is a wonderful bird colony, and a visit during the nesting season will well repay anyone who takes an interest in bird life.

To my mind, the great attraction about the Irish Free State, so far as fishing is concerned, is that there are still little-known districts in it which have great possibilities for a fisherman who is willing to face the inevitable hardships and disappointments that fall at times to the lot of the explorer.

Nowadays it is more than ever a matter of luck and patient search to come across good fishing, especially salmon-fishing, at a moderate cost. But, as an example of what can be done, only last season a friend of mine rented a beat on the upper waters of a Southern river for £100, on which he caught over one hundred and thirty salmon to his own rod.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

SHOOTING IN THE IRISH FREE STATE

IN the previous chapter it has been shown how greatly the fishing in the Free State has benefited by the restoration of order and the new regime, but, unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the shooting.

During the troubles most of the shot-guns in the country were commandeered by rival armies and game got a much-needed respite.

In spite of the ravages of vermin, partridges, which had become almost extinct, increased in a very encouraging way, and grouse moors could once more be described as such without straying too far from the truth.

Pheasants have never been numerous in Ireland, except around the few estates where they were reared in the old days. Now most of these estates have been broken up, and with a few exceptions—such as Cahir Park, Colonel Charteris's place in Tipperary—pheasant-rearing on a big scale is a thing of the past. Much of the country, however, is peculiarly suited to wild pheasants, but in districts where these birds were quite common some years ago scarcely one is seen now.

Directly the various disturbances were over, shot-guns became available to all and sundry, and, in consequence, game suffered cruelly in and out of season.

With the sale of properties under the various Land Acts, in most cases the game rights passed to the tenants, many of whom made no attempt to preserve their lands, and conditions made it impossible for the few big landlords left in the country to do so.

Local poachers, reinforced by disbanded men, started once more to live on the country by shooting and selling all the game in it. Farmers who had buried their guns in the bad times dug them up again. In spite of their precarious condition, these weapons accompany their owners on early-morning expeditions to bring in the crows, so that no opportunity may be missed of browning a covey of partridges on the stubble, or potting a pheasant on the edge of the covert. As if this were not bad enough, a new and worse element has been introduced by Ford-loads of sportsmen from the towns descending on the peaceful countryside on Sundays and blazing away in all directions. At last, however, there is some sign that "that better sense of citizenship" which is doing so much to improve fishing has awakened to the urgent need of taking steps to preserve the little game left in the country from total extinction. Associations for this purpose have been formed in a few districts, and some farmers are now not only preserving their lands, but have at last realized the importance of not shooting out the stock of birds. The Government, too, is about to introduce more stringent laws for the protection of game, and

there is reason to think that that excellent police force the Civic Guard will take an active part in enforcing them, and in seeing that no one shoots game without a licence, or is in possession of a gun without a permit. This will be a great help, for at present the whole onus of preserving game falls on the shoulders of private individuals, or societies like the Irish Game Protection Association. Unfortunately it is now rather a case of "locking the stable door after the horse has been stolen." The game in many districts in the Free State has been practically exterminated, and re-stocking, such as is now being done on some estates in Northern Ireland, will have to be carried out. It would be a good plan, also, if partridge-shooting were allowed only between, say, 1st October and 31st December; grouse-shooting, 1st September to 10th December; and pheasant-shooting, 1st November to 31st December—this would give these birds a chance. A similar plan has been worked in Canada with great success.

The opening of the season on the 1st of September instead of, as formerly, on the 20th is one of the worst things that could have happened to the partridge. Numbers of birds are not fit to be shot on the 1st of September and fall easy victims to the pot-hunter, who wipes out whole coveys.

I think, too, there is little doubt that the spraying of potatoes with sulphate of copper—a practice which is now much more universally adopted by Irish farmers

—is responsible for the poisoning of a good many partridges. I found three dead landrails in a potato-field which had been treated in this way last summer.

Grouse have never been very plentiful in Ireland, but in a country where the "Glorious Twelfth" is often celebrated in July, and wide tracts of heather annually burnt in the breeding season, it is a wonder how they survive at all. On a good moor some years ago two guns might have got ten to twelve brace over dogs, but nowadays they would be lucky in getting half that number.

With the exception of that arch-villain the grey crow, I do not think that vermin do as much damage to grouse or other game in a wild state as is generally supposed; at any rate, Nature, if left alone, is usually able to repair it. As an example of the wonderful perseverance of grouse in the face of every disaster, on 12th August 1927, while shooting a hill in Co. Kilkenny, we disturbed a grouse from her nest which contained six eggs. A lot of the heather on the hill had been burnt in April, and again in June; also several pairs of grey crows had reared their poisonous broods in the neighbourhood. Probably the first and second clutch had been burnt or robbed, and the plucky bird was making a third attempt. Unfortunately, a young member of our party took some of the eggs, but in any case it is very doubtful whether the grouse could rear her family so late in the season.

It is a curious fact about the Irish grouse that,

although efforts were made on several moors in the past to increase the stock by better preservation, improving the heather, keeping down vermin, and introducing new blood, they never met with much success. Of course the number of birds increased, but to nothing like the same extent as they would on a Scottish moor under similar conditions.

Some Irish sportsmen maintain that the native bird is larger than its Scottish cousin, but I have never seen enough of them to be able to form an opinion.

Probably some of the best grouse-shooting in the Irish Free State is now to be found in Co. Wicklow, where the moors have always been more or less preserved. The mountains of Galway, Mayo and Kerry used to be fairly good, but on most of them birds are very scarce these days. Poachers have also had a good innings on the Tipperary and Waterford mountains. If fishing in Co. Donegal in August, an odd day can be spent after grouse. Some of the hotels rent moors where a hard day's tramping may be rewarded by four or five brace.

Days on the side of a mountain are always exhilarating, but one must be prepared for an experience such as befell me a few years ago. I happened to be staying in Co. Cork in August, and received an invitation on the twelfth to shoot on one of the mountains which divide that county from Kerry. I knew that there was small chance of getting any grouse, but, like many other

people at this time of year, I get an irresistible longing for the smell of heather, so gladly accepted. After a motor journey of many miles, followed by a stiff climb up the mountain, our party of four guns emerged on as lovely and promising a stretch of moorland as any to be found in Scotland. The day began well enough. A brace of Irish setters, which were ranging the moor in wide sweeps in front of us, soon showed by their behaviour that they had "winded" game. Before long the dogs came to a dead "set," and, on our approach, three grouse rose together within range. Unfortunately the birds flew straight in the direction of the keeper—a picturesque old ruffian garbed like a Quaker, with the face and dignity of a bishop.

Our host, who had the reputation of being rather an erratic shot, yelled at him to lie down in the heather, an order which he showed some reluctance in carrying out—so much so, indeed, that the grouse escaped without a shot being fired, and we never saw them again. In the circumstances one can hardly blame the old man, who felt deeply aggrieved by the abuse which was showered upon him. Long after, I heard him muttering to himself: "Sure, didn't I lie down in the heather and pray to the good God that the grouse would be kilt and not meself. What more could any man do?" What more, indeed!

It was a gorgeous day and the heat of the sun was almost tropical. In spite of it we tramped the whole

mountain, but all we saw was an old cock-grouse, which got up with a derisive chortle well out of range. It was fairly obvious that the mountain had been well shot over before the season opened, and our suspicions were confirmed later by finding a couple of new empty cartridge cases—a discovery which led to the unfortunate keeper getting into trouble again, this time with more reason.

Although the day ended in a blank, I still remember the beauty of a hillside clothed in autumn gorse and heather—acres of gold and purple, a drink of water, icy cold, from a mountain spring at lunch-time, and a view over half the Kingdom of Kerry. After all, as our host remarked at parting: “If it hadn’t been for that damn fool, Phelan, getting in the way, we might have had three grouse.”

So far as migratory, or largely migratory, birds—like snipe, woodcock and wild-fowl—are concerned, it is pleasant to be able to record that there does not seem to be any marked falling off in their numbers during recent years. Although some very good bags were made in England, especially in Norfolk, the winter of 1927–1928 was certainly a disappointing one for snipe and 'cock in some Irish districts. So far as my experience goes, however, there were a fair number of these birds in the country, but the vagaries of the weather made them more difficult to find than usual.

Snipe are generally left alone, as they are too difficult



Photo : A. A. Lisney

CAMOUFLAGE

A typical woodcock's nest in Ireland. The bird's bill is concealed by twigs

for the ordinary poacher to hit and not worth the large expenditure of ammunition. It is impossible to make a big bag of woodcock except at a carefully organized covert shoot with beaters, and the native who is shooting for the market seldom gets more than a brace or two. Wild-fowl, especially migratory wild-fowl, which visit inland bogs, are usually well able to take care of themselves. After all, it is these species which have always formed the backbone of shooting in Ireland and which especially appeal to the man who loves wild sport.

Many Irish people regard shooting simply as a pleasant way of spending an odd day when not hunting. In southern hunting counties, such as Cork, Tipperary, Waterford and Kilkenny, rough shooting—chiefly snipe—can generally be obtained for the asking, and friends who own good 'cock coverts are usually generous with their invitations. Parts of Westmeath, too, are not at all bad for snipe and duck, and quite good snipe-shooting can be got around that popular hunting centre, Adare. But it is in the West of Ireland, in non-hunting districts like Kerry and Mayo, a large part of Galway and Donegal where there are miles of mountains and bogs, that the best shooting can be obtained.

Scattered through the West there are hotels with thousands of acres of shooting, which yield a sporting mixed bag to a good walker. At Waterville, Co. Kerry, the "Butler's Arms" hotel is a good place for snipe and

'cock, and any amount of rough shooting can be had from the hotel at Glencar. Mongan's hotel, Connemara, has some 60,000 acres of wild country to ramble over, where one has the chance of 'cock, snipe, plover and wild-fowl. Achill Island is sometimes very good for 'cock, and at Mallaranny, about eight miles away, the railway runs a comfortable hotel which has recently rented some good rough shooting for its guests. Clare is another island off the West Coast which is in the line of migratory woodcock. A lot of birds land here early in the season and some remain. The shooting rights on the island belong to the Government and are usually let, but in winter the difficulty is often how to get out to it.

All that wild, poverty-stricken and little-known district lying between Blacksod Bay and Killala Bay, called the Barony of Erris, is well worth exploring. There is a great deal of rough shooting to be got, fair salmon- and good trout-fishing, but the trouble is where to stay. So far as I know there is only one hotel which is any good to a sportsman—Murphy's, at Belmullet—and here any amount of rough shooting and some fishing can be got by arrangement. There are also one or two lodges in the Barony, with shooting and fishing, which are generally to be let. To take a lodge like this for three or four months should be far cheaper than staying at an hotel if there are several in the party.

Personally, I should like nothing better than to be

able to spend a winter rough shooting in this way with one or two carefully chosen companions. In spite of all the bad things that are said about the climate in winter, there are days when it is a joy to be out—days when the lights over mountains and bogs are wondrously beautiful. It is true that there are many others when the whole landscape is blotted out by mists from the Atlantic, when, although owing to the proximity of the Gulf Stream it is seldom really cold, the penetrating and all-pervading damp chills one to the very marrow; but then indoors there are good turf fires, good books and good fare—mountain mutton and game, home-made bread and butter, and the indigenous potato, washed down with occasional doses of the wine of the country. What could be better?

A motor is nearly always a necessity, for you are often forty miles or more from the nearest railway station, and there are sometimes long distances to cover to and from shooting or fishing.

Some of the best wild-fowl shooting inland is to be found round the Bog of Allen. Most of it is preserved, but it is generally possible to rent a shoot at a very moderate figure. Last year some friends of mine took a bog near Durrow, in Queen's County, and had excellent sport with duck and snipe.

While on the subject of grouse-shooting in Donegal, I forgot to mention that a friend, who stayed at Adara, told me that after covering miles of country he secured

a few grouse, but had to pay 6s. 6d. a brace for them. Footsore and weary, he not unnaturally felt a little hurt about it. I have never heard of such a charge being made elsewhere. But, apart from grouse, there is a great deal of rough shooting to be got at Adara and other places in Donegal—a lot of it is free, or available by staying at the hotels. The hotel at Gweedore, for instance, has some 25,000 acres of shooting—'cock, snipe, plover, duck and geese.

There are several other hotels in the Irish Free State with shooting, and occasionally one comes across private houses where it is possible to stay comfortably as a paying guest, and get excellent sport. But it must always be borne in mind that this kind of rough shooting is very dependent on weather conditions. As a rule, in the West of Ireland, 'cock- and snipe-shooting are best before Christmas, and in Southern counties from December up to the end of the season.

In the old days one could wander at random over many parts of the country, but it is always advisable now to ask permission of the farmers. This is seldom refused—for snipe-shooting at any rate—and in Ireland a little ordinary civility like this pays well when either shooting or fishing.

The Ministry of Fisheries, which now controls the Irish Land Commission and Congested Districts Board, has much rough shooting and a few lodges to let, principally in Galway and Mayo, around places like



Photo: J. Kershaw

" MOTHER LOVE "

Leenane, Westport and Ballycroy. Shooting is also advertised in sporting papers, but, speaking generally, it is not worth paying a high rent for it. One ought to be able to get enough rough shooting to provide small mixed bags throughout the season for from £20 to £40.

During the past few seasons I have joined with two friends in a shoot in Co. Kilkenny, not because it is a good shooting county, but because I happen to live in it. We have the shooting over a couple of hills, which in a good year might hold thirty to forty grouse between them, although we never succeed in getting more than a few brace. There are several miles of agricultural land, with perhaps four or five coveys of partridges spread over it. But on these uplands the harvest is a late one, and it is well-nigh October before all the crops are cut and the hum of the threshing engine rises from the farms. By this time the birds are wild and strong on the wing, and even if one is lucky enough to come across a covey, in the roots or on the stubble, the rest of the day may well be spent in a vain effort to find them again. Running up the side of one of the hills is a wood of larch and oak, which is at times quite good for 'cock, and there are one or two fair snipe bogs. The total cost is £19 per year, and most of this goes in paying small sums to various odd people "to have an eye to it" and stop undue poaching.

Our game-bags are usually light enough, but at all

events we knock many a pleasant day's exercise out of it.

As in other parts of the South of Ireland, there are odd hares and plenty of rabbits, but these we leave to the farmers who turn out with "tarriers" and greyhounds on Sundays and holidays.

I have seen many an exciting chase, accompanied by wild whoops from the "field," when a hare is started like this by the dogs in its own country, and the chances are all in its favour, so it nearly always escapes.

Unfortunately we have no duck-shooting, but, to compensate in some degree for the absence of fighting, one can have quite good sport on a winter's evening waiting for golden plover on the hilltops, or pigeons returning to the wood.

Around the Irish coast there are places which have always been famous haunts for wild-fowl, and which in the past have attracted Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey, Captain Vincent, and many another fine sportsman.

Tralee Bay or Dingle, in Kerry, the mouth of the Shannon, Galway, Killala and Sligo Bay are names which bring back memories to many an old wild-fowler of good days afloat, memories of "setting up" to dense packs of widgeon or brent feeding on the ooze when the ebb-tide uncovers the succulent *Zostera maritima*, and of seeing black clouds of teal suddenly springing up to wheel across the wastes.

Like everywhere else, these places are not what they

were. With the possible exception of brent-geese, the number of wild-fowl visiting them is decreasing annually, while the number of punt-gunners and shore-shooters has about doubled. I know of only one resort—Wexford Harbour—where, thanks to efficient preservation on sportsmanlike lines, wild-fowl are not only holding their own but actually increasing.

My attention was first drawn to this place one grey November morning coming up in the Rosslare boat-train. It had been a rough crossing from England, and I was just debating whether I could face breakfast or not, when I was cheered by seeing, in the faint light of dawn, a big "gaggle" of grey-lag geese descending in beautiful spiral curves on a field next the railway. Lowering the carriage window I could just hear their thrilling music above the noise of the train, one answering the other like a pack of hounds picking up a good scent.

Inland, from Rosslare to Wexford, are miles of flat grasslands intersected by ditches, drains and fleets, and protected from the sea's encroachments by a wall. Where this sea-wall runs out to the sand-dunes, mud-flats, with creeks and channels twisting their sluggish course through them, stretch away to the harbour's entrance. A melancholy, desolate-looking spot, but a paradise to the wild-fowler, for grey-lag geese in their thousands, and duck of every species, spend the winter between these Sloblands and the fields and marshes

near by. When the tide is out the notes of fowl, bewildering in variety, drift across the flats, increasing in volume as night approaches.

The shooting belongs to a local gentleman who is a good sportsman and who has done much by careful preservation to make it, in spite of its comparatively small area, one of the best wild-fowl shoots in these islands. It is divided into the North and South Slobs. The North Slob, on which there is a small shooting-lodge, is best for geese. It is at present let, and the rent is, I believe, somewhere in the neighbourhood of £300 a year. This may seem a big sum to pay for wild-fowling, but it is worth every penny of it. Last winter, on a day when it was blowing a gale and other conditions were favourable, a party of six guns—posted in carefully chosen spots—by keeping the geese on the move between them shot ninety-five; and the duck-shooting is also exceptionally good. It is curious that even in fine weather the geese seem reluctant to leave the place although in all it is not more than three or four miles in extent. Of course they are seldom disturbed between the shoots, which are held about once a fortnight, and there are grasslands and good feeding all round.

Round Wexford Harbour there are four or five professional punt-gunners who are out pretty regularly through the winter. I was talking to one of them recently, and he told me it is only during the past

twenty or thirty years that grey geese have visited the place. Grey-lags largely predominate, but there are a fair number of white-fronted geese, and a few bean-geese as well.

Grey-lags begin to come in from about the 20th of October, and the young birds usually arrive some days in advance of their parents. How they find the way for the first time from their summer home in the Far North to this point on the Wexford coast is one of the many interesting problems of bird migration, and a wonderful instance of hereditary instinct. By about the first week in November the main body of geese have arrived and taken up their winter quarters, with an incredible amount of noise and fuss.

It has always been a good place for brent, barnacle and widgeon, and these fowl, with the exception of barnacle, show no signs of falling off in numbers. I hope to visit Wexford one winter, for it is always interesting to see wild-fowl—especially geese—in such numbers, but, so far as shooting is concerned, there is not much to attract a visitor unless he could arrange for a day on the Sloblands; also, he might be able to get a certain amount of rough shooting in the neighbourhood by writing to the manager of the Golf Hotel, Rosslare.

A Kerry friend of mine tells me that the end of October sees the arrival of enormous numbers of brent-geese at Ballyheigue and Tralee Bay, where at low tide

there are vast tracts of banks visible, and abundant supplies of sea-grass and laver in the shallows.

Barrow Harbour, a land-locked lagoon, is another great haunt of geese. Gaggles of grey and barnacle-geese flight daily across the Fenit Peninsula between the bays and marshes, but the brent only occasionally leave the sea to take a short cut from one bay to another.

Duck are fairly plentiful, but hard to get, and some of their haunts inland are preserved.

There are no punts for hire, but one could get a certain amount of shore-shooting round Tralee and Ballyheigue, and any amount of snipe-shooting, which is at times very good.

To bring a shot-gun into the Irish Free State is quite simple. Applications should be made about a fortnight beforehand to the Secretary, Department of Justice, Dublin, and forms for this purpose can be obtained at the High Commissioner's Office in London. On arrival in the Free State, a permit for the gun and a certificate which enables one to shoot game can be obtained from the nearest Civic Guards Barracks on payment of £2. Ammunition can be purchased locally by anyone holding a permit.

In these notes on shooting and fishing I have tried to paint a true picture of the sporting possibilities of the Irish Free State. In case my love of the country and of wild sport has led me into any exaggeration,

may I conclude by repeating that blank days and disappointments will sometimes be the sportsman's lot. But no words of mine can exaggerate what the Irish Free State has to offer to the man or woman for whom the bag is only a secondary consideration, and whose main happiness lies in being able to roam at will over miles of unspoilt country.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

PARTICULARS OF IRISH HUNTS: FOXHOUNDS

(SEASON, 1927-1928)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Hunt and Couple of Hounds</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Huntsman</i>	<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Meets</i>	<i>Centres for Residence</i>	<i>Nearest Railway Station</i>	<i>Stabling Ac- commodation</i>	<i>Hunters, where obtainable</i>	<i>Subscriptions and Cap Charges</i>	<i>Special Fees for Temporary Visitors</i>
Ballymacad (20 couples)	Capt. W. I. Naper (1919)	The Master	A. Harman, Esq., Kileagh House, Old- castle	Tues. Fri.	Oldcastle; Castle- pollard	Oldcastle; Castle- pollard	Oldcastle; Castle- pollard	From members and farmers	Min., £5, 5s. Cap, 2s. 6d.	Donations expected
Carlow (30 couples)	Mrs. W. Hall (1920)	W. E. Grogan, Esq.	Major A. McM. Kavanagh, Borris House, Borris, and Capt. H. A. Bruen, Straw Hill, Carlow	Tues. Sat.	Carlow; Bagnals- town; Tullow	Carlow; Bagnals- town; Tullow	Carlow; Bagnals- town; Tullow	...	Min., £10. Cap—Mem- bers, 5s.; Farmers, 2s. 6d.; Visitors, 10s.	Arrange- ment with Secretary
Clare					Ennis	Ennis				
Coollattin (21 couples)	D. H. Doynes, Esq. (1908)	The Master	J. Geraty, Esq., M.D., Carnew, Co. Wicklow	Two a week	Shillelagh; Carnew, Co. Wicklow	Shillelagh	Shillelagh, Carnew	C. H. T. Reade, Esq., Donishall, Carnew, Co. Wicklow	£5. Cap, 2s. 6d.; Visitors and Non- Subscribers, 5s.	5s. per day

Duhallo (45 couples)	J. S. Sheppard, Esq. (1919)	The Master	Capt. E. Phipps, M.R.C.V.S., Mallow, Co. Cork	Mon. Tues. Thur. Sat.	Mallow ; Buttevant ; Doneraile	Mallow ; Buttevant ; Doneraile	Messrs. Smith & Sheehan, Mallow, £3, 3s. per day	Min., £25. Members, or those with one horse, £15. Cap, 2s. 6d. per day ; Non-Sub- scribers, £1	Arrange- ment with Hon. Sec.
Co. Galway (The Blazers) (45 couples)	Colonel O'Malley- Keyes (1926)	C. James	J. D'Arcy, Esq., New Forest, Mt. Bellew, Co. Galway, Ballinasloe	Mon. Wed. Fri. Sat.	Athenry ; Loughrea ; Galway ; Tuam	Athenry ; Loughrea ; Galway ; Tuam	Horses obtainable in principal towns	Min., £10. Field money, 2s. 6d. per day	No special charges
East Galway (25 couples)	F. A. Kenny, Esq.	The Master	Capt. T. O. Seymour, Ballymore Castle, Ballinasloe	Mon. Thur.	Ballinasloe ; Portumna	Ballinasloe ; Portumna	Ballinasloe	Min., £10. Cap—Mem- bers, 2s. 6d. Non-Mem- bers, £1	Arrange- ment with Secretary
Island (30 couples)	Capt. S. Godfree (1921)	The Master	W. Lett, Esq., Clone Ferns Co. Wexford	Tues. Fri.	Gorey ; Ferns ; Ennis- corthy	Ferns ; Camolin	C. H. T. Reade, Donishall, Carnew	Min., £5. Cap, 2s. 6d.	10s. per day
Kilkenny (50 couples)	Major D. McCal- mont (1921)	The Master	Capt. A. J. Fox, Dangan, Thomastown, Co. Kilkenny	Mon. Wed. Fri. Sat.	Kilkenny ; Thomas- town	Kilkenny ; Thomas- town ; Mullinavat	Mr T. Butler, New St., Kilkenny ; Mr J. Ryan, Mullinavat, Co. Kil- kenney	£10 per horse. Cap, 2s. 6d. each day	Visitors may hunt for 3 days at a cap of 10s., after which they become liable to a

1 <i>Hunt and couples of Hounds</i>	2 <i>Master</i>	3 <i>Huntsman</i>	4 <i>Secretary</i>	5 <i>Meets</i>	6 <i>Centres for Residence</i>	7 <i>Nearest Railway Station</i>	8 <i>Stabling Ac- commodation</i>	9 <i>Hunters, where obtainable</i>	10 <i>Subscriptions and Cap Charges</i>	11 <i>Special Fees for Temporary Visitors</i>
Limerick (42 couples)	Capt. R. B. Brassey (1924)	F. Grant	E. Leahy, Esq., County Club, Limerick	Mon. Wed. Fri.	Adare ; Croom ; Limerick	Adare ; Croom ; Limerick	Adare ; Croom ; Limerick	J. P. Hogan, Greenpark, Kilmal- lock; James Murphy, Adare ; Power Bros., Rathkeale	£15, one horse; £20, two horses. Cap, 5s.	£1 per day Hon. Secretary
Louth (30 couples)	Capt. R. A. B. Filgate (1916)	The Master	Major Shirley, Lough Fea, Carrickma- cross, Co. Monaghan	Wed. Sat.	Drogheda ; Ardee ; Dundalk	Drogheda ; Dundalk ; Ardee	Drogheda ; Dundalk	A. Don- nelly, Esq., V.S., Drogheda	Mem., £10. Cap, 2s. 6d. Strangers, £1	£1 per day, or arrange- ment with Secretary
Meath (50 couples)	Capt. R. H. Fowler (1926)	W. Fitz- simons	J. A. Law, Esq., Ardbracan House, Navan, Co. Meath	Tues. and Fri. in "Dublin" country ;	Navan ; Trim ; Dun- shaughlin ;	Kells ; Navan ; Drum- ree ; Dunboyne ;	Navan ; Drum- shaughlin ; Kells ;	Brady, Dunboyne ; Logan, Dunboyne ;	£15 for each day's hunt- ing in each week of the	£1 per day, or arrange- ment with Secretary

Mount Uniacke (20 couples)	W. H. Doyle, Esq., (1921)	The Master	M. Webb, Esq., Mt. Uniacke, Kilcagh, Co. Cork	Two a week	Dublin ; Duboyne ; Kells	Kilmessan ; Trim	Dunboyne ; Dublin ; Drumree	Capt. Bar- ret, Dun- shaughlin ; Quinn's & Pesterres, Dublin ; Duffy, Finglas, Co. Dublin, £2, 2s. per day ; L. Rogers, Rathoath, Co. Meath	season ; Ladies, £10 ; Officers of the British Army on full pay, at half above rate. Cap— Subscribers, 2s. 6d. ; Non-Sub- scribers, £1	Min., £5, 5s. for those not owning land in limits of country hunted over
Muskerry (30 couples)	Capt. Hornby	M. Brien	Major Mahony, St Ann's Hill, Cork	Wed. Sat.	Cork ; St Ann's HillHydro, Macroon	Cork ; Blarney	Cork ; St Ann's Hill, Hydro.	Youghal district ; moderate charges	£10 per horse. Cap. 2s. 6d.	Cap, £1 per day, or arrange- ment with Secretary

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Hunt and couples of Hounds</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Huntsman</i>	<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Meets</i>	<i>Centres for Residence</i>	<i>Nearest Railway Station</i>	<i>Stabling Accommodation</i>	<i>Hunters, where obtainable</i>	<i>Subscriptions and Cap Charges</i>	<i>Special Fees for Temporary Visitors</i>
Ormonde (25 couples)	G. F. Webb and H. M. Read, Esqrs. (1920)	G. F. Webb, Esq.	H. Davis Kenny, Esq., Ballingarry House, Shinrone, Co. Tipperary	Tues. Fri.	Birr; Bor- risokane; Roscrea	Birr; Bor- risokane; Roscrea	Dooley's Hotel, Birr; Cleary's Hotel, Bor- risokane	No hiring- out estab- lishments	From £5 to £30. Cap. 2s. 6d.	Optional
Queen's County (25 couples)	M. P. Minch, and Esq., and Major Hamilton	T. McCarthy	Major Hamilton, Roundwood, Mountrath	Tues. Fri.	Durrow; Abbeyleix; Maryboro; Athy	Abbeyleix; Maryboro; Athy; Durrow	Ballaculla; Durrow; Abbeyleix; Maryboro; Athy	J. W. Pratt, Durrow; Mr J. Con- roy, Forest, Mount- rath; Mr R. Seale, Tinnahoe; Mr Maher, Sawyer's Wood, Athy	Min., £10. Cap—Sub- scribers, 5s.; Non- Subscribers, 10s.	Arrange- ment with Secretary
Scarteen (Black and Tans) (23 couples)	J. J. Ryan, Esq. (1904)	The Master	G. A. Harris, Esq., Ballikisteen, Co. Tipperary	Tues. Sat.	Kilmal- lock; Knock- long; Tipperary	Knock- long; Tipperary	Tipperary	Reason- able in Tipperary	Min., £5, 5s. Cap. 2s. 6d.; Non- Subscribers, 10s.	Write to Hon. Sec.

South Union (21 couples)	Committee	A. Love, Esq.	F. Simcox, Esq., Bloomfield House, Douglas, Co. Cork	Tues. Fri.	Cork ; Carriga- line ; Crosshaven	Cork	C. A. Love, Esq., Ballea, Carrigaline, Co. Cork	C. A. Love, Esq., Ballea, Carrigaline, Co. Cork ; £3 per day	Min., £5. Cap, 2s. 6d. per day	10s. per day, or arrange- ment with Hon. Sec.
Tipperary (52 couples)	Committee	F. H. Wise, Esq.	Major H. H. Hutchinson, Cahir	Two days a week	Clonmel ; Fethard ; Cahir ; Cashel	Clonmel ; Fethard ; Cahir ; Cashel	Clonmel ; Fethard ; Cahir	...	£15, 15s. Cap, 2s. 6d. per day	Cap, 10s. per day, or arrange- ment with Hon. Sec.
United Hunt Club (45 couples)	Major A. H. Watt (1926)	The Master	E. D. Harring- ton, Esq., United Hunt Club, Lee View, Montenotte, Cork	Mon. Wed. Fri.	Cork ; Fermoy ; Middleton	Cork ; Fermoy ; Middleton	Cork ; Fermoy ; Middleton	From local horse- dealers ; £3, 3s. per day	£10 for one horse and £7, 10s. each succeeding horse. Cap, 2s. 6d.	£1 per day. Strangers hunting for not more than 2 months will be charged half usual subscription. Guests staying with a member, free for a fortnight, except 2s. 6d. cap

1 <i>Hunt and couples of Hounds</i>	2 <i>Master</i>	3 <i>Huntsman</i>	4 <i>Secretary</i>	5 <i>Meets</i>	6 <i>Centres for Residence</i>	7 <i>Nearest Railway Station</i>	8 <i>Stabling Ac- commodation</i>	9 <i>Hunters, where obtainable</i>	10 <i>Subscriptions and Cap Charges</i>	11 <i>Special Fees for Temporary Visitors</i>
Waterford (35 couples)	Marquis of Waterford and R. Russell, Esq. (1926)	R. Russell, Esq.	Major R. H. Carew, Ball- inamona Park, Waterford	Mon. Wed. Fri.	Portlaw ; Carrick-on- Suir ; Waterford	Carrick- on-Suir ; Waterford ; Portlaw	Waterford ; Carrick- on-Suir	W. Murphy, Waterford ; M. Widger, Wexford ; W. Shana- han, Kil- macThomas	£10. Cap, 2s. 6d.	10s. per day, or arrange- ment with Secretary
West Waterford (30 couples)	I. Villiers Stewart, Esq., and Miss Musgrave	Capt. J. Wall	C. J. Murphy, Esq., Dungarvan	Five days a fortnight. Monthly card from Secretary	Lismore ; Cappoquin ; Dungar- van ; Clashane ; Youghal	Lismore ; Cappo- quin ; Dun- garvan ; Youghal	Lismore ; Cappoquin ; Dun- garvan ; Clashane ; Youghal	Through Secretary if written to in advance	£5 per horse voluntarily. Cap, 2s. 6d.	10s. per week, or arrange- ment with Secretary
Westmeath (45 couples)	Capt. C. Purdon- Winter	The Master	Major J. Roche Kelly, Gaybrook, Mullingar	Mon. Wed. Fri. Sat.	Mullingar	Mullingar	Mullingar	Messrs. M. J. Purcell, V.S. ; W. C. Patrick, F.R.C.V.S., Mullingar ; R. Cleary, Esq., Streams- town,	Min., £10, 10s. Cap, 2s. 6d.	£1, or arrange- ment with Secretary

Wexford (20 couples)	Committee	C. H. De Coursey Barry, Esq.	T. A. Colfer, Esq., New Ross	Tues. Fri.	New Ross; Wexford	New Ross; Wexford	New Ross; Wexford	From hunting farmers, reasonable charges	Min., £6, 6s. Covert Fund, £2. Cap, 2s. 6d.	ros. per day. Strangers hunting more than 6 days are expected to subscribe
								West- meath; Capt. Clibbon, V.S., Coolna- mona, Streams- town, West- meath		

STAGHOUNDS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Hunt and couples of Hounds</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Huntsman</i>	<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Meets</i>	<i>Centres for Residence</i>	<i>Nearest Railway Station</i>	<i>Stabling Ac- commodation</i>	<i>Hunters, where obtainable</i>	<i>Subscriptions and Cap Charges</i>	<i>Special Fees for Temporary Visitors</i>
County Down (35 couples)	R. Dun- ville, Esq., (1926)	S. Gillson	Capt. R. F. Henry-Wyvis, Strandtown, Belfast	Tues. Thur. Sat.	Belfast ; Down- patrick ; Banbridge ; Ballyna- hinch	Belfast ; Down- patrick ; Banbridge	See next column	Jas. Milling, The Square, Comber, Co. Down ; J. B. McRoberts, Ballyoran, Dundonald, Co. Down ; R. Jonson, Dublin Rd., Belfast ; R. J. Hale, Dromore	Members, £21. Cap, £1 to Visitors. Field money, to subscribers, 3s.	Arrange- ment with Secretary

Ward Union (22 couples)	Hon. Mr Justice Wylie	W. Strickland	M. Leonard, Esq., St Kevin's, Darty Road, Dublin	Wed. Sat.	Dublin ; Dun- shaughlin ; Dunboyne ; Clonsilla ; Lucan	Drumree ; Dunboyne	Hogan's & Brady's, Dunboyne ; Geraghty's, Drumree ; Dun- shaughlin (Kelly's)	P. Duffy, Riversdale, Finglass ; M. Quinn, Montpelier Hill, Dublin ; Pesterres, Dublin ; M. Langan, Greenogue, Kilsal- laghan, Co. Dublin, £2, 2s. and £3, 3s. per day ; Rogers', Ratoath	£10 for one day's hunt- ing per week, £15 for two days. Cap— gentlemen, £1 ; ladies, 10s. (if sub- scribers, 2s. 6d.)	No special arrange- ments
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HARRIERS

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Hunt and couple of Hounds</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Huntsman</i>	<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Meets</i>	<i>Centres for Residence</i>	<i>Nearest Railway Station</i>	<i>Stabling Ac- commodation</i>	<i>Hunters, where obtainable</i>	<i>Subscriptions and Cap Charges</i>	<i>Special Fees for Temporary Visitors</i>
Mid- Antrim	R. Morton, Esq.	...	W. J. Wood- side, Esq., Ballymena	Mon. Wed.	Ballymena	Ballymena	Jas. Henry, Mill Street, Ballymena	John Bamber, Farm Lodge, Ballymena; Hugh Boll, Slatt; S. Boll, Brigadee, Ballymena	£5, 5s. Cap, 2s.	Cap, 5s.
Bray	E. B Peyton, Esq.	...	D. T. Moore, Esq., Tudor House, Kingstown	Wed. Sat.	Bray; Kings- town; Dublin	Bray	Bray	...	Min., £5, 5s. Cap, 2s. 6d.	...
Clonmel	...	...	J. J. Berkerry, Esq., Clonmel	Tues. Fri. 15th Oct.- 31st Mar.	Clonmel; Fethard; Cahir	Clonmel	Clonmel; Fethard; Cahir	From Master, £2, 2s. per day	Optional, Cap, 2s.	10s. per day
East Down	J. Craig, Esq.	...	J. W. Tate, Esq., M.D., Ballyhomare, Ardglass	Mon. Fri.	Down- patrick; Newcastle	Down- patrick; Newcastle	Down- patrick	W. Moore, Down- patrick; £2, 2s. per day	£10, 10s. Field money, 2s.	10s. per day

North Down	Major Hall-Thomson	...	R. S. Grainger, Esq., The Beeches, Hollywood, Co. Down	Sat. and Wed. from 2nd Oct.	Belfast; Comber; Newtownards	Belfast; Comber; Newtownards	Jas. Milling, Comber	Jas. Milling, Comber; J. B. McRoberts, Dundonald; S. Bailie, Newtownards, £2 per day	£15 per season. Cap, nil	£1 per day
Fingal	Mrs Carson and Mr A. Craigie	...	R. Craigie, Esq., Harristown, St Margaret's, Co. Dublin	Tues. (adjoining Dublin). Fri. (nth. side)	Dublin	Dublin	Dublin	Pesterres, Montpelier Hill, Dublin; Duffy, Rivermont, Finglas, Co. Dublin, £2, 2s. and £3, 3s. per day	£5 for Non-Landholders, Cap, 2s. 6d.	Cap, 10s.
Gaultier	Sir Robert Paul, Bart.	...	Major R. Carew, M.C., Ballinamona Park, Waterford	Mon. Wed.	Waterford	Waterford	W. Murray, Imperial Hotel, Waterford	Apply to Master	Voluntary. Cap. 2s. 6d.	Voluntary
Hillside	Mr Blackshaw	...	Miss Nina Blackshaw, Ballyroan House, Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin	Wed. and Sat. from 30th Oct.	Dublin	Dublin	Dublin	From Master and others, at £2, 2s. 2s. 6d.; others, 5s.	Voluntary. Cap—Subscribers, 2s. 6d.; others, 5s.	Cap, 5s.

I	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Hunt and couples of Hounds</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Huntsman</i>	<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Meets</i>	<i>Centres for Residence</i>	<i>Nearest Railway Station</i>	<i>Stabling Ac- commodation</i>	<i>Hunters, where obtainable</i>	<i>Subscriptions and Cap Charges</i>	<i>Special Fees for Temporary Visitors</i>
Iveagh	R. H. Coey, Esq.	...	G. H. Coey, Esq., Ashfield, Dromore, Co. Down	Wed. Sat.	Banbridge; Dromore	Banbridge	Banbridge	R. J. Hale, Bridge St., Banbridge, £2, 2s.	£5, 5s. Cap, 2s. 6d.	No special arrange- ments
Kill	Capt. de Stacpoole	...	Capt. G. de Stacpoole (Master), Tobertynan, Enfield, Co. Meath	Tues. and Fri., from and Nov.	Enfield; Summer- hill; Trim	Enfield; Trim	Enfield; Summer- hill; Trim	...	£3. Cap, 2s. 6d.	...
Killinick	...	...	T. F. Kelly, 17 Michael St., Wexford	Mon. Thur.	Wexford; Rosslare	Wexford; Rosslare	Livery Yard and Hotels, Wexford, arranged by Hon. Sec.	B. Hickey, V.S., Quay, Wexford, £2 per day	£2 for season. Cap— gentlemen, 2s.	No special fee, but a 10s. dona- tion to the cap is fixed to meet the same
Kilshane	A. G. Seton, Esq.	...	Mr N. F. Maher, Pegsboro, Co. Tipperary	Wed. Fri.	Cashel; Dundrum; Tipperary (Residences apply Sec.)	Cashel; Dundrum; Tipperary	Tipperary; Dundrum	Local dealers, 30s. per day, or £4, 4s. per week on lease	Min., £5. Cap, 5s.	Cap, 10s

Co. Longford	Capt. N. W. Mayne	...	Jas. O'Farrel, Esq., Gurteen House, Edgeworthstown	Tues. Fri.	Longford ; Edgeworthstown, Ballymahon	Longford ; Edgeworthstown, Ballymahon	H. Garaghan, Ballymahon ; G. Allen, Longford	£5. Cap, 2s. 6d.	Cap, 10s.
Mitchelstown	M. O'Dwyer, Esq.	...	Michael M. O'Dwyer, Esq. (Master), Mitchelstown, Co. Cork	Two days a week	Mitchelstown	Mitchelstown	Locally ; apply to Master	£5. Cap, 2s. 6d. ; day	10s. per day
Major O'Hara's	Major C. K. O'Hara	...	A. C. O'Hara, Esq., Annamore, Colloney	Tues. Fri.	Colloney	Colloney	...	Voluntary	Voluntary
North Kildare	...	...	...	Mon. Fri.	Lucan ; Celbridge ; Maynooth ; Dunboyne	Dunboyne	...	Min. £3, 3s. Cap, 2s. 6d. Non-Subscribers, 10s. 6d.	...
Portarlington	...	...	Rev. D. Murphy, C.C., Portarlington	Tues. Sat. First week Nov. to end Mar.	Portarlington	Portarlington	Tuohy (huntsman) and Clarke, Portarlington, £1, 1s. per day with harriers, £2, 2s. per day with fox-hounds	£2, 2s. for free card. Cap, 2s. 6d. ; Subscribers of £10, cap free ; others, cap, 5s.	Cap, 5s.

I	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<i>Hunt and couples of Hounds</i>	<i>Master</i>	<i>Huntsman</i>	<i>Secretary</i>	<i>Meets</i>	<i>Centres for Residence</i>	<i>Nearest Railway Station</i>	<i>Stabling Accommodation</i>	<i>Hunters, where obtainable</i>	<i>Subscriptions and Cap Charges</i>	<i>Special Fees for Temporary Visitors</i>
Route	Major J. A. Montgomery	...	Mr A. Clarke, Ballysally House, Coleraine	Tues. Frid.	Coleraine; Portrush	Coleraine; Portrush	Coleraine; Portrush	...	Min., £5. Cap, 2s. 6d.	No Special arrangements.
South Westmeath	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Strabane	W. B. Smyth, Esq.	...	W. B. Smyth, Esq. (Master), Strabane	Wed. and Sat. from 23rd Oct.	Strabane	Strabane	Strabane	A. Shodgrass, V.S., Railway Road, Strabane; J. Taylor, Gortford, Castlefin, Co. Donegal; W. F. McConnell, V.S., Bowling Green, Strabane	£5 and £10. Cap, 2s. 6d.	...
Thurles and Templemore	Messes J. J. Maher and E. J. Ryan, Liberty Square, Thurles	Tues. and Fri., commencing Nov.	Thurles; Templemore	Thurles; Templemore	Thurles; Templemore	Apply to the Secretary	£5, 5s. Cap, 2s. 6d.	5s.

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